

PC GAMER

PC GAMER

CD-ROM EDITION VOL. 2 NO. 9

The Dig

On The CD!

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- Druid
- Fade to Black
- Tank Commander
- Mortal Combat II
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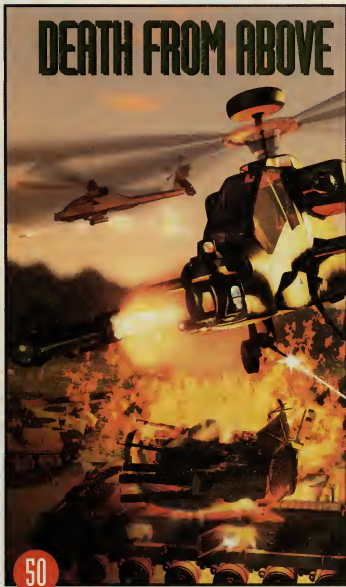
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Product Information Number 148

Cover Story

DEATH FROM ABOVE



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Death from Above

Breaking away from the arcade flying action of *Wing Commander* and *Strike Commander*, Origin, Jane's, and Electronic Arts join forces to produce a stunning new line of air-combat simulations. We've got the exclusive on this exciting new union, and it seems the world of hard-core flight sims may never be the same.

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>EASY DOS IT

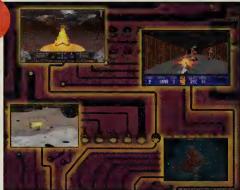
Running Your DOS Games Under Win 95

Windows 95 has all sorts of built-in goodies to help you get your DOS games up and running under the new operating system. But just in case you need some help getting started, we've got all the tips you'll need to make Windows 95 your gaming platform of choice.

The Joys of Sharing

The shareware phenomenon that exploded with id's *Doom* has tempted many would-be designers with the promise of fame and fortune. We check out this growing field, and ask top developers about the pitfalls and benefits of doing it yourself.

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Our agents in the field have been compromised, the terrorist leader is still at large, but a recent communication revealed...

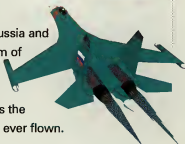
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Known for more than just his salads, Caesar was responsible for creating a world power from his throne in Rome. And Impressions recreates that experience in vivid detail with *Caesar II*.



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You talk, we listen. When it's over, we all feel better. It's that simple.

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Have we got a deal for you!



I'm gonna miss this job...

Sad news for me this month, this will be my last issue as editor-in-chief of *PC Gamer*. I'll still be close by, as the publisher of *PCG*, but I'm going to miss this job more than I can say.

Taking over will be our own WEE Danny Bennett, deputy editor and great lover of gaming. He knows what makes this magazine work, and I'm sure you're going to like him as much as I do.

But more about me. What does a publisher do, you ask? Well, I think it has something to do with numbers. My head is full of numbers all of a sudden. But it also entails making sure that this continues to be the magazine you want it to be, and that we build on our position as the best-selling PC games mag in the world.

So anyway, I'll see you all later. Next month you'll meet Dan, he'll tell a few jokes, and it'll be back to business as usual. Feel free to write me from time to time, and let me know what you think of Dan's leadership.

Because if he screws up, I'll have to come back...

Matt

PC Gamer (ISSN 1088-2088) is published monthly by Imagine Publishing, Inc., Suite 700, 120124 Highway 67, Lubbock, TX 79403. Second-class postage paid at Lubbock, TX, and additional mailing offices. Postmaster: Please send address changes in the United States to PC Gamer, P.O. Box 120124, Lubbock, TX 79403. Outside the United States, please send address changes to PC Gamer, P.O. Box 120124, Lubbock, TX 79403. Payment should be made in U.S. dollars. All rights reserved. All trademarks and registered trademarks are the property of their respective owners. All other trademarks are the property of their respective owners. ©1995 Imagine Publishing, Inc. All rights reserved. Printed and manufactured in the U.S.A.

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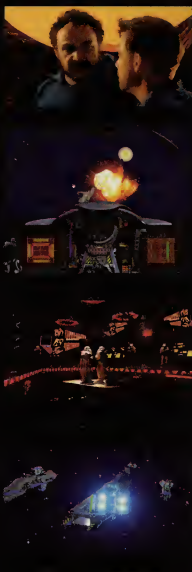


<http://www.ea.com/origin.html>

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Product Information Number 135



ORIGIN®
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THE CD

INSTALLING • PLAYING • QUICK TIPS

Brace yourself for a highly concentrated dose of gaming! Welcome to *The CD*...

We've got a kickin' line-up on *The CD* this month. First off, there's LucasArts' latest out-of-this-world graphic adventure, *The Dig*. Then we have the amazing *Fade to Black* by Electronic Arts. Sir-tech's netherworldly adventure, *Draid*... and that's just the beginning! Take a look at the game list to the right for a rundown of all the rich gaming goodness on *The CD*.

On our 3.5" floppy diskette (available to you lucky subscribers) and on *The CD* this month we have *SimTower* — the latest in a long line of excellent world-building sims by Maxis. Check it out on page 28.

And lest we forget all the other things that make PC gaming so much fun, we have a new collection of bug patches, shareware, *Doom II* WADs, *Heretic* WADs — and for the first time,

Descent WADs. For you online fanatics, we've got the front ends to the *Imagination Network*, *Genie*, and *PlayNet*.

These Disc Pages will help you get started on *The CD*, describe what the games are about, and provide requirements, tips, and other helpful info. So before you jump blindly into a demo, give these pages a quick review. They're here to help you enjoy the games to their fullest.

Getting Started

The CD Requirements

Minimum Requirements: 386SX, SVGA (640x480x256 colors), VESA driver, Mouse

We Recommend: 486DX2/66, Double-speed CD Drive, Mouse

These requirements are for loading *The CD* only. Each game demo will have its own additional requirements — so be sure to read the info for each demo carefully! And for you tech types, please note that *The CD* will perform much faster with SmartDrive loaded.

Quick Start: The CD

If you're familiar with DOS, configuring your system, and all those fun things that make PC gaming such an adventure, getting started couldn't be easier. But if you need a little help, here's what you need to do:

1. Insert *The CD*, and change to your CD-ROM drive by typing D, where D is the name of your CD drive. If you're in Windows, close out of it (ALT-F4) and exit to DOS.

2. Type PCG, and press Enter.
3. You're now in our point-and-click front end, where you can look through the text files and help screens for specific demo requirements. If you have any problems installing a game, proceed to *Manual Installation*.

Manual Installation

In the event that our front end for *The CD* doesn't load or run properly on your system, you can still install each game, bypassing our front end all together.

To manually install a game, take a look at the Command Table located in the upper-left corner of the following page. This box contains a list of games, with their directories and installation commands.

To get up and running using the Command Table, first switch to *The CD*, then change to the appropriate directory by typing *CD\DIRECTORY*, where *DIRECTORY* is the one listed in the Command Table next to the game you're trying to install. Once in the appropriate directory, type the *Install Command*, then press Enter. For example, to install the *Fade to Black* demo:

- Type *CD\DELPHINE* and press Enter
- Type *INSTALL* and press Enter

The game will then be installed to your PC.

The CD is manufactured by ASR.
Before pressing, it is rigorously tested and certified virus-free.

If Nothing Works...

We cannot provide technical and customer support for problems you may encounter with the many different demos and patches on the *PC Gamer CD*. Should your copy fail to run at all, with error messages that indicate your CD-ROM drive cannot read the disc, return it to the following address for replacement:

PC Gamer
The CD #10 Replacement
1350 Old Bayshore Highway
Suite 210
Burlingame, CA 94010

Please do this within the first two weeks after receiving the *PC Gamer CD*. If you're a subscriber, you don't need to mail us *The CD*, but if you purchased the magazine on the newsstand, please include it. Also, indicate any error message you receive.

Game	Directory	Installation Command
The Dig	\THEDIG	DIG
Druid	\DRUID	INSTALL
Fade to Black	\DELPHINE	INSTALL
SimTower	\DISK1	SETUP
Tank Commander	\TANK	INSTTANK
Mortal Combat II	\MK2	INSTALL
Battle Beast	\BBEAST	HDSETUP or CDSETUP
Mega Man X	\MMXDAMO	MMXDAMO
Chaos Control	\CHAOS	INSTALL
Anvil of Dawn	\ANVIL	INSTALL
Dust	\DUST	DUST
Baryon	\BARYON	BARYON
Industrial Killers	\IK	IK
SuperSpeed	\SSPEED	INSTALL
Threat	\THREAT	THREAT
PlayNet	\PLAYNET	DOOM1N2 & HERETIC
GEnie	\GENIE	SETUP
ImagiNation Network	\IMAGINE	FUN
Descent WADS	\DESCENT	
Heretic WADS	\HERETIC	
Doom WADS	\DOOM	
Bug Patches	\PATCHES	

How to use the Front End

- 1 Table of contents.** Click on the program you wish to run — your selection will be highlighted.
- 2 Once a title is selected,** this will give a brief description and system requirements for the program.
- 3 The PCG Logo.** Click here to return to the welcome screen at any time.
- 4 The Icons** — when highlighted, the following options are available:

INSTALL — Choose this to install the program to your hard drive, and to set up program options.

RUN — Click here to run the game from The CD.

NOTES — Select this icon for more information on each program.

HELP — This icon offers basic information about the user interface.

EXIT — Click on this one, and it's back to DOS City.

Free Demos!

And our new PC Gamer Web Site!

First off, remember: You won't find the Floppy Edition of *PC Gamer* on the newsstand anymore. Only our floppy subscribers will get the floppy disk — delivered right to their homes — each month. But you can still nab the free demo on the floppy disk, and a whole lot more, by using our new web site!

Here's the deal for newstand buyers: You now have the choice of purchasing either the CD-ROM Edition of *PC Gamer* for \$7.95 (The CD is included with the magazine), or a version of *PC Gamer* without a CD-ROM or floppy disk for the new low price of \$3.95. If you decide to purchase *PC Gamer* without a CD, you can still get demos from our web site.

All *PC Gamer* readers have the opportunity to get free game demos and other goodies in several different ways:

- 1.** You can download game demos and other cool stuff, such as Strategy Central Plus, from our World Wide Web site at <http://www.pcgamer.com> on the Internet. You can access this site either via an Internet account or through one of the major online services, such as America Online, GEnie, or Prodigy. Check it out!

- 2.** You can mail us the envelope that's bound in this issue. The order form on the envelope gives you four options:

- Get a HD disk (*The Floppy*) mailed directly to you for just \$2.95 shipping and handling.
- Get a CD-ROM disc (*The CD*) mailed to you for just \$5.95 shipping and handling.
- Subscribe to *PC Gamer* with HD disks (*The Floppy*) for \$47.95.
- Subscribe to *PC Gamer* with CD-ROM discs (*The CD*) for \$47.95.

SimTower

Company: Maxis
 Phone: (510) 254-9700
 Release date: Available Now
 Category: Software Toy
 Requirements: 386; Windows 3.1; 4MB RAM; SVGA
 Install: \SIMTOWERSETUP



For more info on *SimTower*, the latest builder from Maxis, turn to page 28...

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Product Information Number 146

The Dig

Company: LucasArts
Phone: (415) 721-3349
Release Date: Fall '95
Category: Graphic Adventure
Required: 406; 8 MB RAM; Mouse
Install: DIG.DIG.BAT

In July's issue of *PC Gamer*, we took you behind the scenes with LucasArts' newest graphic adventure, *The Dig*. Now we give you a chance to take a look at what this ground-breaking game has to offer.

The story? A huge asteroid enters an unstable orbit around Earth. Commander Boston Low, pilot extraordinaire, leads an expedition to set explosives on the large rock and knock it into a more stable orbit. During the procedure, a shaft is discovered leading into the heart of the asteroid. Low and his crew-mates—television news reporter Maggie Robbins (covering the project for NASA's public image) and the German geologist Ludger Brink—go in to investigate. They discover that the asteroid isn't a natural body at all, and after finding and fiddling with an alien gadget, they suddenly find themselves shooting off into space faster than you can say "light speed."

The demo opens after the three crew-members are dumped on an inhospitable alien world. It's now up to you to help the stranded astronauts find a way home, as well as discover the hidden secrets of an apparently extinct extraterrestrial race.

Playing the demo is as simple as clicking your mouse buttons. Left-clicking on an object or person performs an appropriate action, and right clicking brings up your inventory menu. You can look at an item in inventory by clicking on the magnifying glass, and then click-



In the animated cut scenes included in the demo on this month's CD, you'll see some of the exciting graphics *The Dig* has to offer. But be sure to watch out for that first step; it's a doozy!

ing on the item. To use an item, select it, and then right-click to go back to the playing screen.

Originally started 5 years ago, and surviving a few false starts, *The Dig* looks as if it will be a game worth waiting for. The original plot was inspired by Steven Spielberg himself and refined over the years by project leader Sean Clark. The plot is so convoluted and intense that Alan Dean Foster, veteran of fantasy and science fiction novels as well as movie and TV adaptations, will write a novel based on *The Dig*.

In this demo, you'll see examples of the beautiful landscapes and back-grounds that make *The Dig* visually stun-

ning. Using a combination of 3D modeling and 2D hand-drawn artwork, LucasArts has created a universe full of stark beauty. We're sure you'll find yourself marveling at the smooth movement and realistic actions of the characters as you help them explore their newly discovered world.

The full game is slated to have 60 hours of gameplay for the experienced gamer, as well as a musical score that will also be released by Polygram Records on audio compact disc. We're sure you'll agree that this is one game that deserves to go at the top of that Christmas Wish List!

HINT

Discovering *The Dig*

WARNING! This Walk-Thru will take you through the whole demo. If you don't want to spoil the puzzles, DON'T READ ON!

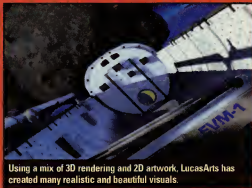
From the start of the demo when



You'll find an abandoned alien ship in the valley where you start the demo. To see some of the amazing animation featured during gameplay, try pulling on this wire...

you're near the dais, walk to either side of the screen. In the overhead view, walk to the question-marked object to the west. You will see a large, extraterrestrial ship. After the surprised exclamations of your crew members, walk into the ship. You will notice a wire hanging down from the ceiling. Clicking on it will make Commander Low walk over and pull down on it. Be prepared for a shocking surprise.

Once your crew members have regained their composure, walk back to the dais where you began, and you'll see a revision of the entity you encountered at the ship. Use your trowel on the hole the apparition disappeared into, and Low will start digging. At this point, the characters



Using a mix of 3D rendering and 2D artwork, LucasArts has created many realistic and beautiful visuals.

take over, and you can watch as Geologist Brink plummets to his death. There's not much you can do to stop Brink's demise in this demo. You'll just have to wait until you can play the full game to figure out how to save him.

Be sure to explore the area well. There's plenty of objects to find here.

"This ain't no flight sim...this rocks."

"The 3D environments are simply breathtaking... the worlds are like nothing seen before in computer games."

-Computer Player

"It's a 3D vehicle shooter that's part Star Wars and part Descent."

-Computer Gaming World

"Terminal Velocity is a symphony of titillating action and g-force slurring excitement..."

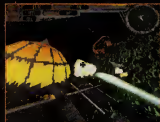
-Strategy Plus



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Maximum destruction



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Mortal Kombat II

Company: Acclaim Distribution, Inc.
Phone: (516) 624-9300

Release Date: Available Now

Category: Fighting Game

Required: 386DX/33, CD-ROM drive, 4MB RAM

Install: WCVNSTALLEXE

Just as the memory of the blood-'n-guts original begins to fade, along comes *Mortal Kombat II* — reminding us that we can never get enough of a really good beat-'em-till-the-blood-spurts-everywhere fighting game.

The old gang has returned, and they're fightin' and bashin' their way to the top of that imposing pyramid of ruthless rivals. So get ready to rock your PC with gut-wrenching punches and face-flattening kicks. And don't forget those astounding Fatality moves!

In this demo, you get a good sampling of what the full version holds in store. There are only two playable characters; Player 1 controls Liu Kang, and Player 2 controls Reptile. Even though only two characters are available (if you try to play the single-player tournament, you won't advance past Reptile, the first computer opponent), they both have their full range of special moves and Fatalities, a must in any fighting game.

Play control is completely configurable. Simply press F10 when the demo

Puttin' on the moves...

Just to assure you that *MKII* is as bloody as its predecessor, here are the Fatality finishing moves for Liu Kang and Reptile. We've also thrown in the Friendship and Babality moves, for the squeamish.

D=Down, **F**=Forward, **B**=Back, **HK**=High Kick, **LK**=Low Kick, **LP**=Low Punch, **TI**=Turn Invisible

Liu Kang

Fatality 1: D,F,B,B,HK
Fatality 2: Full 360 degree circle away from opponent
Friendship: F,B,B,B,LK
Babality: D,D,F,B,LK

Reptile

Fatality 1: B,B,D,L,P
Fatality 2: TI,F,D,H,K
Friendship: B,B,D,LK
Babality: D,B,B,LK

starts up, and you can set your controller type, keyboard setup, sound, and the detail level. On slower computers, the demo will probably run best with the detail set to low.

If you let the introduction play, you'll see the history behind Shang Tsung's failed attempt to take over the world in



In a spectacular fatality move, Liu Kang gets a mighty peckish because he wasn't fed on time. Bon Appetit!

Mortal Kombat, and Shao Khan's vengeful desire to crush those who defeated his minions. But if you're like the rest of us and just want to get to the bloody action, press F1 to start playing as Player 1, or F2 for Player 2.

Keys for Victory

Player 1:

- Up
- Down
- Left
- Right
- Low Punch
- High Punch
- High Kick
- Low Kick
- Block

Player 2:

- Up
- Down
- Left
- Right
- Low Punch
- High Punch
- High Kick
- Low Kick
- Block

★★★★★

(OUT OF FOUR) JUST AS THE STAR WARS SAGA SET NEW SCI-FI MOVIE STANDARDS, DARK FORCES SETS A HIGH MARK..." — USA TODAY

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coming this fall

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Product Information Number 112

Fade to Black

Company: Electronic Arts
 Phone: (415) 571-7171
 Release Date: September
 Category: Graphic Adventure
 Required: 486/33, 8MB RAM
 Install: DELPHINE\INSTALL.BAT

The sequel to *Flashback*, *Fade to Black* is a graphic adventure/first-person shooter with a twist — you actually see your character from a “chase plane” view! You play scientist Conrad Hart as he tries to escape the clutches of the very aliens he believed he’d defeated in the first game. In *Flashback*, Conrad discovered that extraterrestrials with the ability to morph themselves into humans were intent on conquering Earth. Fighting through an army of aliens, Conrad detonated a nuclear reactor on the alien homeworld, and set himself adrift in an escape pod. He had no choice but to enter cryogenic sleep and hope that he would someday be found. Unfortunately, it was the beings he thought he had destroyed that eventually captured his pod. Once again, Conrad has to fight his way through morphing martians to accomplish his goal — to survive.

Conrad starts the game with a pistol and communications device. It’s up to you to lead him on his escape from the huge alien vessel, taking out as many aliens as he can.

HINT

There’s a reason why *Fade to Black*’s designers refer to it as “the thinking man’s *Doom*.” *Fade to Black* isn’t just about action; you’ll have to use your head, too.

There’s a room just off the infirmary where aliens keep pouring in, no matter how many you shoot. To get past this, you have to go to the next level up — the elevator is on your right when you walk in. Once you clear the next level of the robot and single alien, go back to the previous level and take out the two aliens. Then you can walk over to the white box with the light on top, activate it, and the demo will be over.

If you’re one of the lucky players with a Pentium computer, you can play the demo at 640x480 resolution with a smooth frame rate. The rest of us can either deal with a lower frame rate, or play in the still-beautiful 320x200 resolution. You can toggle between resolutions by hitting the F8 key during play.

The interface is a bit different from what you may be used to. By hitting the Alt key, you move from walking mode into shooting mode. Then you can aim and fire with the arrow keys and Control key, respectively. You have nine shots in a clip, with an unlimited supply of clips. To reload your weapon, press the Enter key. You can access your inventory by pressing “I.” You can then scroll through the items with the tab key, and look up information on the item by hitting the



There are two aliens ganging up on you here. To finish this demo, you need to clear this room of its nuisances and go over to that med panel you see across from you.

right Shift key. You receive your first message at the beginning of the game in this manner. To access options such as saving a game, loading a game, video

mode, or adjusting sound, press the Escape key. For more information on game controls, see the READ.ME text file on The CD.



**“10 RATING...
 DARK FORCES IS
 THE GAME THAT DOOM II
 SHOULD HAVE BEEN...
 A MUST-OWN.”**
 — COMPUTER PLAYER

**“CONSUME YOU
 IT WILL!”** — YODA






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Playing!



Start having fun on Windows® 95 with Pitfall: The Mayan Adventure — 13 thrilling levels, fantastic side-scrolling gameplay, stunning animation and a truly incredible soundtrack.

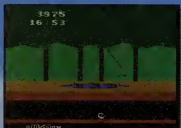
Because the best reason to upgrade to Windows® 95 is... **playing!**



It's sheer panic above the crocodile pits!



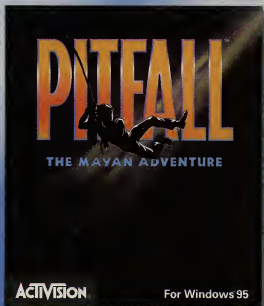
Beware the slicing claws of the Jaguar Man!



The original PITFALL! — Hidden in the game!



Grab a vine but don't look down!



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Druid

Company: Sir-tech
 Phone: (315) 393-6633
 Release Date: October
 Category: Roleplaying/Graphic Adventure
 Required: 486/33; SVGA; Mouse; 4MB RAM
 Install: DRUID\INSTALL.EXE

Designer Dimensions Interactive have created one of the most beautiful graphic adventure/RPG games we've ever seen with their new release, *Druid*. In this demo you play Kian, a human warrior brought from his own world by Druids to find their missing brother. Armed only with your trusty battle-axe and a simple, but devastating, spell (there are more spells in the full version), you set out on a journey that will require all your skill as a warrior — as well as all the intellectual prowess you can muster.

The point-and-click interface allows smooth control of your character. In a skewed, top-down perspective, you'll lead Kian through dangerous jungles.

You're given two weapons to use against the monsters that harass you along the way. One of the weapons is your battle-axe; with it, you have two types of attacks — upper and lower. To use them, simply click on the upper or lower portion of the creature you're fighting. The other weapon you have is the magic spell the Druids taught you before abandoning you to your quest. To activate your spells, right click anywhere on the screen. You will be given a choice of four elements. In this demo, the only spell you can cast is fireball, so it doesn't matter what elements you choose. When you're ready to cast the spell, click on the lightning bolt at the bottom-right corner of the menu, then click on the creature you want to fry. In the full game, you'll be able to mix elements to create new and deadly spells.

The world you have to explore in this demo may be limited, but it hints at a sprawling land full of exotic creatures and malignant monsters. You'll find hours of gameplay in the full version.

To see what else the game will have to offer, watch the slide-show intro in the demo. Be prepared for beautifully rendered scenery and creatures as you explore this dangerous realm — and keep an eye out for the full version of *Druid* slated for October 1st release.

HINT

The fireball spell can be devastating. In fact, you probably won't ever need to enter hand-to-hand combat, since you won't run out of magic ability in this demo. Simply stay far away from the monsters you want to take out, and use the fireball spell on them. If you get too close, you can't perform magic and must rely on your handy axe. After a few hits, they'll go down, and you can continue on your merry way.

Happy adventuring!

Species Human
 Gender Male

STR 12
 SP 17
 INT 15
 CON 9
 PER 12

H.P. 12/12
 M.P. 8/4
 Psionic 14

Exp Pts 1024
 Exp Lvl 1

Money 421

This is an example of the gorgeous rendering job Dimensions has done with this game. The sprites you control in our demo on the CD are just as detailed, but a little bit smaller.



"IS IT AS GOOD AS DOOM? ACTUALLY, IN ALMOST EVERY WAY, IT'S BETTER."

— COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

"FEARLESS AND INVENTIVE!"

— JABBA THE HUTT



A FIRST PERSON, ORIGINAL STAR WARS® CD-ROM EXPERIENCE.

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CHECK OUT THE DARK FORCES DEMO ON THE LUCASARTS BBS AT (415) 257-3070.

Product Information Number 124

We've dug up trouble.



FREE TITANIUM TITAN CONTROLLER (W/3 BUTTONS) A \$14.95 VALUE!

capcom's first pc cd-rom game.

Buried in a capsule by his creator, Dr. Light, MEGA MAN X reemerges to face SIGMA and his force of maverick reloid robots before the human race is wiped from the planet.

Now the TITANIUM TITAN appears on PC CD-ROM, and comes with a free 6-Button Controller!



CATCH MEGA MAN EVERY WEEK IN THE 2ND SEASON OF HIS TOP-RATED CARTOON SERIES! AND WATCH FOR EXCITING NEW MEGA MAN TOYS FROM BANDAI!



CAPCOM

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Product Information Number 91



Chaos Control

Company: Philips Media
 Phone: (900) 340-7888
 Release Date: Available Now
 Category: Arcade
 Required: 486DX; VGA; 4 MB RAM; 550 Free
 Conventional Memory; Mouse
 Install: CHAOSVINSTALLEXE

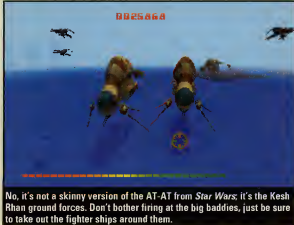
Strap on your best gunner gloves and get your mouse finger ready to blast the baddies out of the air in this action-packed demo from Philips Media. You play the talented and dangerous Lt. Jessica Darkhill as she leads the Ares Interception Squad, ridding the Earth of Kesh Rhan, a distinctly bug-like alien race. You'll be shooting them down in droves, if your mouse-aim is steady enough. You command a turret gun in a fighter ship as you sweep the city streets of pests. Don't worry about where the ship is going, just nail those insectoids when they come into view!

The action is fast and furious, and the graphics are stunning in this sampling of what Philips has to offer. Be prepared to destroy every baddie on the screen, but watch out for friendly forces — they blow up just as easily as the bad guys.

The story is told via the beautiful Japanese animation in the introduction. On March 3, 1972, the Earth launched the Pioneer 10 satellite, containing coordinates for the location of our home planet. In 2050, the transmissions of the satellite ceased. The reason, which soon became apparent, was the Kesh Rhan. After destroying a colony on Mars, the Kesh Rhan are heading for our beloved home planet. As Ace-Pilot Jessica Darkhill, you have been ordered to attack the flagship of the intruding aliens, and make sure they don't bother the human race ever again. It will take patience and a itchy trigger finger to make sure the invading bugs are exterminated — for good!



Ace-Pilot Jessica Darkhill is on a dangerous mission to save our home planet.



No, it's not a skinny version of the AT-AT from *Star Wars*; it's the Kesh Rhan ground forces. Don't bother firing at the big baddies, just be sure to take out the fighter ships around them.

TIP

Although the larger vessels look like they'd crumple under your lasers, you won't be able to destroy them. If you fire at them, you'll do nothing more than heat up your guns. Keep an eye on the small cannon gauge to the right of the screen; if you overheat, you won't be able to fire for a while.

GOOD NEWS.

The Doctor Thinks He Can Help You.

IT BLEEDS ACID.

IT CAN READ YOUR MIND.

IT IS A BORN KILLER.

IT IS THE LEAST OF YOUR WORRIES.

ALIENS

A COMIC BOOK ADVENTURE

IN SPACE, EVIL WEARS MANY FACES.



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Product Information Number 128

Mega Man X

Company: Capcom Inc.
Phone: (408) 774-0500

Release Date: Available Now

Category: Arcade side-scrolling action

Required: 48K/55; 4 MB RAM; Sound Blaster or Compatible

Install: MMXDEMO/MMXDEMO.EXE

In this latest move from the world of video games to PC, Capcom has brought its popular cartridge character Mega Man to computers everywhere. *Mega Man X* is the first appearance of this blue-suited super-hero on the PC — and you saw him on the PC Gamer CD first!

Jump and blast your way to an encounter with the renegade robot Sigma — a good 'bot gone tragically wrong. You're the world's last chance to defeat this nightmarish heap of electronic gadgetry, and it'll take a twitchy trigger finger to get the job done.

The demo can be played with a keyboard, joystick, or gamepad. The keys are completely configurable under "Options" at the main menu. Control is best with a game pad, but if you don't have one, don't worry — the full game will come packaged with a Capcom Control Pad.



If you make it this far, you'll have a brief yet exciting encounter with Sigma. I wonder if he can transform into a fighter plane?

HINT

Mega Man's weapon has different levels of destruction. The longer you press and hold the fire button, the more powerful his shots become. This can be rather handy when you need to take out two of Sigma's minions at once!



If you tap the fire button, you'll get a little wimpy shot. However...



holding the button down for a while lets loose a wave of destruction.



BAD NEWS.

His Name Is Dr. Frankenstein.

STARRING TIM CURRY
COMING THIS FALL

FRANKENSTEIN

Through The Eyes Of
THE MONSTER™



"Your Premier Macintosh Game Source."

Interplay
BY GAMERS. FOR GAMERS.™

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Product Information Number 121

Anvil of Dawn

Company: New World Computing
 Phone: (818) 889-5550
 Release Date: Early October
 Category: Roleplaying Game
 Required: 386/33, 4 MB RAM, Mouse, SVGA
 Install: VANVIL\INSTALL.BAT

New World Computing beautifully blends 3D rendering and 2D artwork in this spectacular new roleplaying adventure. You travel through metic-

ulously rendered landscapes and battle gruesome monstrosities. You'll be amazed at the stunning quality of the artwork in our demo as you explore a small portion of the full game's huge world. Prepare your eyes for a treat, because this is one of the most beautiful RPGs we've ever seen!

When loaded, the program goes into a self-running demo. As soon as you're ready to enter the playable portion, press the escape key. The interface

is simple — control movement by clicking the mouse when the arrow points the direction you want to go. Click on the character portrait to access inventory, magic, and game options. To see the map, click on the map box in the bottom-right corner of the screen. To swing your sword, click the sword box below your character's portrait, and to cast a spell, click the snowflake icon. When you're ready to quit the demo, press Alt-Escape during the playable portion.

Slimy Encounters

You'll meet this guy immediately after setting foot in the Keep. The lizard's cute — it's his backside buddies you gotta look out for!



Character Portrait: Click here to access inventory, magic, etc.

Health Meter: Reports your health level.

Magic Meter: Reports how many magic points you have left.

Left hand: Uses what is in your left hand.

Right hand: Uses what is in your right hand.

Cast Spell: Click here to cast a spell.

Compass: Use this to find your way through dark corridors.

Map: Click on this to see a map of the area.



Battle Beast

Company: 7th Level
 Phone: (214) 437-5531
 Release Date: Available Now
 Category: Fighting
 Required: 486DX/33, 8 MB RAM, SVGA,
 Windows 3.1
 Install: BBEAST\HDSETUP or CDSETUP

In 7th Level's new fighting game, you'll see some of the cutest, most lovable animals around beat each other senseless with mallets, anvils, and lasers. No, it's not a new episode of



They may be cute, but boy do they play rough! Where did Sparky get that mallet, anyway?

"That's My Dog" — it's *Battle Beast*, and the action is hot. Not only do you get to beat up other cuddly animals, but the characters morph into even more daunting foes. What used to be a man's best friend can become a mechanical killing machine, and if you thought the rats in the sewer were bad, watch out for these buck-toothed monsters!

In this remarkable demo, you get to play two characters — Sparky and Vermil. Don't let their good looks fool you, though; they pack quite a punch, especially when they become Spartacus and Varmian, their morph counterparts. These huggable creatures pull weapons out of unexpected places and use them with deadly accuracy. You'll have to keep on your toes if you want to compete in this wacky arena!

The controls differ from other fighting games. Instead of pressing one key to punch or kick, you use a combination of keys to



Here's a list of controls for *Battle Beast*; you can access this screen by pressing F1 at the main menu.

attack. Make sure you study the commands (pictured above) so you can control your beasts with proficiency. It's a dog-eat-dog (or rat) world out there, and it's always a good idea to be prepared — especially if you're on the menu.

TIP

Mastering the moves in *Battle Beast* can be difficult. To see what can be done once you get the controls down, set the player options to Computer vs. Computer. Then you'll see a really cool fight!

<http://www.ea.com/eastudio.html>

FADE TO BLACK
 YOU DON'T PLAY IT, IT PLAYS YOU.

If you don't have access to the interactive Web page, call 1-800-245-4525 for a free demo disk (\$4.95 for shipping & handling) and \$5.99 off your purchase of *FADE TO BLACK*.



THE BEST OF TWO GAMING WORLDS FROM SIERRA

Sizzling space combat simulation

Compelling role-playing adventure

in

THE LAST DYNASTY™



Playing in Combat phase, you are Mel Rauq, flying a rogue starship for Symest 4.



Design your cockpit, selecting the information you want to see on the flight monitor.

Play the adventure and combat phases simultaneously and experience total gaming freedom! Move decisively as you try to find clues in the adventure phase, but don't wait too long to act. All of the action is in real time. Misfortune awaits a player who hesitates. As you tear through space, lasers blazing, an on-board computer will update you on the action as it happens. Access a virtual 3-D map to guide you toward your fateful confrontation with Lord Iron.

"It absolutely reeks atmosphere and plot."

- PC Zone

"The Last Dynasty could well set a new standard to the games world."

- PC Spiel

"A game with breathtaking futuristic graphics."

- MPC



Switch to Adventure phase and become Mel Raug, intergalactic hero and preserver of the Ultimate Knowledge.



Visually spectacular with full-screen, SVGA 3-D rendered graphics and film sequences.



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ARCADE GRAPHICS AND BIGGER PLAYERS!

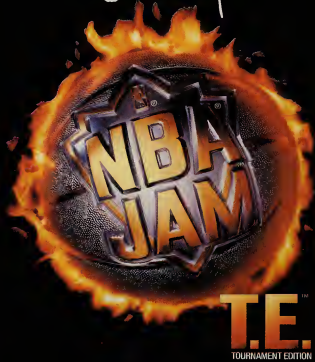


INCREDIBLE MONSTER JAMS!



ALL-NEW MODES OF PLAY!

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T.E.
TOURNAMENT EDITION

It's the greatest NBA™ JAM™ yet! This Jam takes it to a higher court with stunning graphics, player scaling, full motion video and the actual big heads and baby mode arcade feature! Plus, you get updated player rosters, all-new secret characters, and mind-blowing stereo music and sound FX! NBA Jam T.E...Get Pumped!



SEGA SATURN™



PC CD-ROM

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MIDWAY

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Tank Commander

Company: Domark
 Phone: (415) 513-9323
 Release Date: Available Now
 Category: Arcade Action
 Required: 486/33, 4 MB RAM; VGA; DOS 6.0; EMS
 Install: TANK\INSTANK.BAT

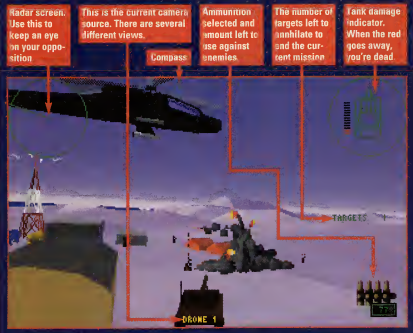
Get behind the wheel of a roving machine of death as you ride the armored vehicles of *Tank Commander* to glorious victory. In Domark's latest action game, you control a mighty tank defending our country's honor in the Middle

East. It's your job to make sure American interests are protected across the globe — and if you have to blow some things up to do it, that's even better, right?

This demo requires that expanded memory be loaded, so make sure the line "device=c:\dos\emm386.sys" is in your config.sys file in DOS. The drain on system resources is considerable, so make sure no unnecessary TSRs are loaded when you begin play.

A View to a Kill

This is one of many views you can have in *Tank Commander*. No matter how you look at it, the action will continue to heat up around you.



Tank Commander Controls

- Move Forward
- Move Backward
- Turn Left
- Turn Right
- Fire Weapon
- Rotate Turret Left
- Rotate Turret Right
- Select Machine Gun
- Select Normal Shells
- Driver's View
- Gunner's View
- Commander's View
- Toggle Resolution

Dust

Company: CyberFlix
 Phone: (615) 546-7466
 Release Date: Early September
 Category: Interactive Adventure
 Required: 386/33; 8 MB RAM; SVGA; Windows 3.1
 Install: \DUST\DUST.EXE

Enter a world of gun-slinging desperadoes in CyberFlix's western interactive saga *Dust*. You play a stranger in the town of Diamondback, part of the New Mexico Territory. You start from scratch — no money, no gun, no nothin'. *Dust* features live video footage of an authentic frontier town in the Wild West. You'll

meet drunks, immigrants, and even the mayor's wife (!) in a town where the sheriff is dead and the crooks run free.

The mouse will be your hands and the arrow keys your feet while you explore this frontier community. Clicking when the mouse is a pointing finger will either pick up an item, or let you speak to a character. To move forward and turn, use the arrow keys.

Although you're only able to explore a small portion of the town, you'll have the opportunity to meet some of its most unusual inhabitants. Remember, this is the Wild West, so be polite!

HINT

When you first enter Diamondback, New Mexico, the drunk that meets you won't let you take away the jug of hooch sitting on the ground next to him. If you wait a couple of min-

utes, he'll walk away, giving you the chance to swigle his brew. You may not be able to use it in this demo, but it's still kinda nice to know you have it...

Welcome to Hard Times

This here's Diamondback! It may not be the most hospitable town, but you're stuck there for a few days, so you might as well make the best of it.



Clicking on this icon shows you a detailed map of Diamondback.

Click here to adjust game options, such as saving, sound, and subtitles.

Object that's currently available. Drag it to the screen to use it.

Click here to access your inventory.

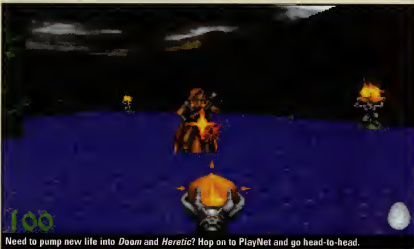
PlayNet

Play Net

Phone: (800) PLAY-NET

Install: PLAYNET:DOOM1MZ or HERETIC

So you want to play *Doom* across the phone lines, but you just can't seem to find anybody that's willing to join you in a Deathmatch at 1 a.m.? Well, look no further. *PlayNet* is a multi-player network that's been established specifically to take advantage of *Doom* and *Doom II*'s modem capability and to give you the opportunity to play with like-minded Deathmatchers.



Need to pump new life into *Doom* and *Heretic*? Hop on to *PlayNet* and go head-to-head.

ImagiNation Network

ImagiNation Network

Phone: (800) IMAGINI

Required: 15MB HD space

Install: VMAGINE\FUN.BAT

If you're looking for an online service that's devoted to having fun, then check out the *ImagiNation Network*. Where most services have bland screen after screen of indecipherable jargon, or at best glitzy colors with the same mind-numbing jargon, *ImagiNation* offers an entirely different interface — a town motif where the various utilities and services are couched in a friendly, familiar surroundings. The friendliness even extends to your own online persona, a graphic representation of you that you can customize to show people what you're really like.

E-mail, conferences, entertainment areas, and the promise of future on-ramps to the Info Autobahn make *ImagiNation* a viable alternative to millions

of other online services. In addition to support for *Doom* and *Doom II*, *PlayNet* now supports *Heretic*, and will soon support *Descent*. You'll also get other features you'd expect from an online service, like shopping, file libraries, chat areas and e-mail.

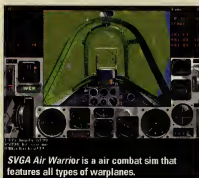
To run *PlayNet* you'll need *Doom*, *Doom II*, or *Heretic*, a 9600 baud modem and, of course, this front end.

After installation, you'll need to fill out the configuration screens. After that, you'll be able to make new friends and then kill them. Payment info is online. Your initial call is 100% free.

As of this writing the rates for

PlayNet, Inc. were:

Target Class	\$10.00	5 hours
Killer Class	\$25.00	13 hours
Assassin Class	\$50.00	30 hours



SVGA Air Warrior is an air combat sim that features all types of warplanes.

GENie for Windows

with *Cyberstrike* and *SVGA Air Warrior*

GENie

Phone: (800) 638-3638

Required: Windows 3.1, 4MB HD space

Install: \GENIE\INSTGENI

For our readers who prefer human opponents over some programmer's idea of artificial intelligence, you'll want to check out the online network *GENie*. Like most online networks, *GENie* offers e-mail, BBS access, conferencing and, as our readers will be glad to note, multi-player gaming. To take advantage of the multi-player games, we've included the front ends to two *Cyberstrike* and *SVGA Air Warrior*, two of the most popular games on *GENie*.

Flight sim fans will want to try out *SVGA Air Warrior*, which will have you flying all types of warplanes through several eras of air combat, from biplanes to modern aircraft. The controls are fairly simple, but with all those human opponents, the missions can get pretty challenging.

Cyberstrike takes you into a futuristic battle scenario where you pilot a massive battle-mech. It's a pretty demanding sim, but once you've got a handle on the controls, you'll be able to roam around blasting the armor off of other online pilots. Energy runs everything in this game — shields, guns and engines — so be sure to stay powered up.

The *GENie* front end will require Windows, 4MB hard-drive space and VGA graphics. *Cyberstrike* will require an additional 2.5MB hard-drive space, and *SVGA Air Warrior* will require a whopping 38MB of additional hard drive space. Each game comes with a README.TXT or MANUAL.DOC file that details the various controls.

For basic service, including e-mail, multi-player games and online chat, the current rates are \$8.95 per month for the first four hours non-prime time and \$3.00 per hour after the initial four hours have been used. There's an additional surcharge of \$9.50 per hour for any prime-time usage. All rates apply to the continental U.S.

who don't really want to know the ins and outs of ZModem and Wildcat, or learn the lexicon of the Internet...at least not yet. Install *ImagiNation* and get all the info on how to get online.

After you install *ImagiNation*, type INN at the DOS prompt and you'll go to the sign-on screens. Because the *ImagiNation Network* ain't free, here are the various user plans and the rates that we received by time of publication.

Welcome Plan	\$9.95/month	5 hours/month
10 Plan	\$19.95/month	10 hours/month
15 Plan	\$29.95/month	15 hours/month
25 Plan	\$49.95/month	25 hours/month
50 Plan	\$99.95/month	50 hours/month



GETTING TO MORADA WAS EASY.



IT WAS SHEER MURDER ONCE WE ARRIVED.



NOTHING WAS AS IT SEEMED.



INCLUDING US.



WE HAD RE-INVENTED OURSELVES.



IN THE SCHEME OF THINGS...



THAT'S JUST THE WAY IT IS HERE.



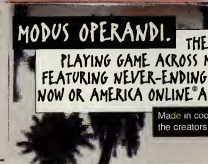
LIKE A MIND JOURNEY OF ADVENTUROUS DECEIT.



BUT HEY, IT'S ALSO A HOOT.



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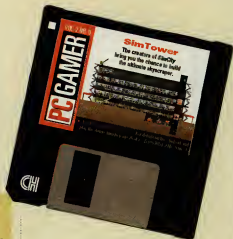
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The Floppy Replacement

September 1995

PC Gamer

1350 Old Bayshore Highway

Suite 210

Burlingame, CA 94010

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SimTower

Company: Maxis

Phone: (510) 254-9700

Release Date: Available Now

Category: Software Toy

Required: 386; Windows 3.1; 4MB RAM; VGA;

Mouse

Install from CD: SIMTOWERSETUP

Welcome to the world of skyscraper management, courtesy of Maxis. In this interactive demo of *Sim-*

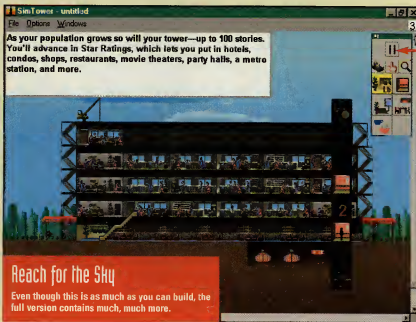
Tower, you are introduced into the exciting world of building and managing a colossal monument to human ingenuity. It's merely a taste of the full product, but it's enough to whet any true simulation fan's appetites.

The demo is basically a walk-thru, showing you how to build a five-story office complex. The prompts guide you from one move to the next, so running the demo couldn't be easier. You simply lay a ground-floor lobby, build offices on

top of it, and create a staircase. The demo then leads you through the grueling process of installing elevators and making sure the business personnel have their lunch-break retreat—a fast food restaurant in the basement.

A nice feature of the game, merely hinted at in this demo, is the ability to name and follow independent businesses and people as they live their daily lives in your building. You're not just a landlord, but a voyeur.

Although you can't build past five stories or add anything but offices in this demo, the full game has a lot more to offer—more than 100 stories of shops, offices, apartments, condominiums, movie theaters, ballrooms, and even a metro station!



Reach for the Sky

Even though this is as much as you can build, the full version contains much, much more.



Demolish item (not in demo)

Stretch elevator shafts

Build lobby

Build offices

Build restaurants

Pause the game

Get info on area

Place elevators and shafts

Build condominium (not in demo)

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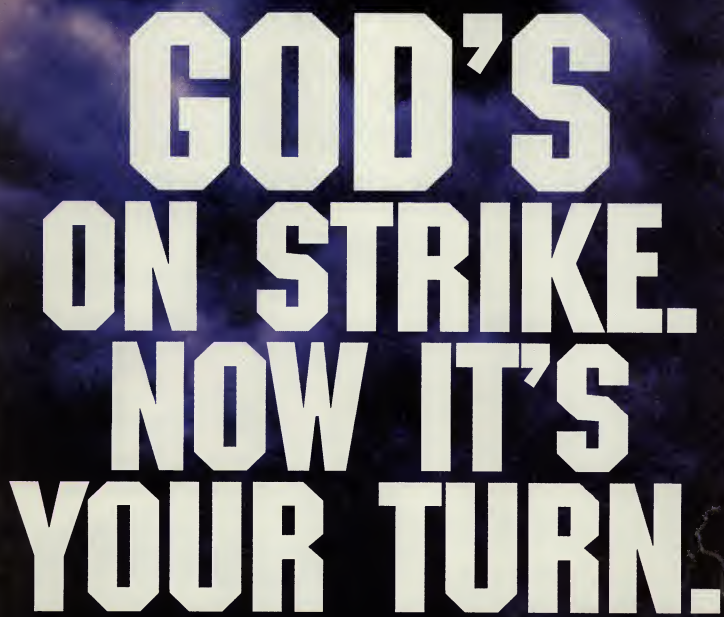
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Caesar II

There's No Place Like Rome...

Yes, you can build Rome in a day — and in Impressions' new Roman Empire epic, it's a beautiful place indeed.

—William R. Trotter



Visit the Forum to allocate labor resources, pay your troops, and find out what you can do for the Emperor in Rome. (Answer: whatever he wants you to do!)

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Game: Caesar II
Developer: Impressions
Publisher: Impressions Software, 222 Third Street, Cambridge, MA 02142 (617) 225-0500
Projected Price: \$69.95
Percentage complete: 80%

In a nutshell:

Part *SimCity*, part resource management, part role-playing saga, and part wargame, *Caesar II* balances historical authenticity with fun. It's big, juicy, colorful, and remarkably easy to get into.

What's so special?

Impressions has put all their experience and expertise into this game — and it shows. It has sumptuous graphics, depth, and a rich texture all its own. It's empire-building on the grandest scale, guaranteed to bring out the megalomaniac in all who play it.

Why should I care?

In just a few years, Impressions has evolved from its modest beginnings in the UK into a major game developer. The developers of *Caesar II* have put a lot of pride and passion into the program; it definitely has the potential to become a classic.

And when's it coming out?

Watch for it in early October.

Call me decadent, but while ancient Greece generally leaves me cold, I've always had a passion for the Roman Empire. Both the heroes and the villains of Roman history were extreme people: Their bravery and sagacity were remarkable, exceeded only by their apparently limitless capacity for cruelty and perversion. They were, in many respects, not unlike ourselves...

Certainly, the history of the ancient world offers no greater spectacle than the rise and fall of the Roman Empire. It manifested colossal power, and it was organized with enough competence to endure for centuries — longer than any other empire in Western history.

If it's to succeed, any simulation of that empire must be comparably vast, and must take into account not only military power, but economic and cultural development as well. And since Roman

history was so often shaped by individual men of destiny, the roleplaying element should allow you to claw your way to the top through a combination of military victories, good administration, and popular appeal (bread and circuses is always a winning formula).

In *Caesar II*, all of these elements are strongly represented, and all are sweetly balanced within a game that plays, to judge from the advanced Alpha version I've been using, as smoothly as a Rolex tells time.

At the start of the game, there is no Roman Empire — just the core province of Latium, hemmed in on all sides by rivals and enemies. Select a province adjacent to Latium, and you are appointed its governor by the current Roman ruler, "Pompous Maximus." Your job is to build a capital city, defend the province, and develop its resources until you either a) achieve the ratings necessary for promotion to another province, or b) are assassinated or executed for incompetence.

City-building is accomplished through a SimCity-like interface of icons. Select a likely plot of land, clear it, then lay out a logical gridwork of roads. Walls and barracks are necessary to protect your citizens against barbarian incursions. You decide on the right mixture of housing, business establishments, temples, gardens, sanitation facilities, and municipal services.

Don't neglect entertainment facilities, either, since popularity is a major factor in your advancement (not to mention your very survival). Theaters, coliseums, and circuses are good investments, so long as you don't bankrupt the treasury by over-doing it.

Urban dynamics are beautifully modeled; all structures on the map exert a positive or negative impact on land values. Additionally, the physical relationships between structures exert a subtle but powerful effect: Areas distant from water supplies, for instance, will always be limited to very low values, and housing development thrives best when residences are secure, sanitary, and have easy access to entertainment centers.

Switching from the City level to the Province level, you can develop the road network, place forts and walls, and build warehouses, shipyards, quarries, mines, and trading posts.

When you are invaded or when your legions encounter armed resistance — should any of the provincials be so ignorant as to decline the blessings of Roman rule — you'll maneuver to meet the enemy on the province map. Then, when contact is made and the fighting starts, the game switches into a tactical battle mode.

There is simply no comparison between these battle scenes and the rather primitive ones dove-tailed into Impressions' original Caesar. Each cohort or horde is crisply rendered in 3D micro-miniatures style. Slingers darken the sky with their volleys, war-



City-building, executed in a fashion similar to SimCity, is an important factor in the game. A fully developed provincial capital really does suggest the "grandeur of Rome," thanks to the superb graphics.

elephants rear and trumpet — hell, you can even see the individual javelins carried by the Romans. There's good tactical control, and the animation is very, very good.

"We gave a lot of thought to the battle scenes," says Impressions' Chris Foster. "We wanted to get some of the scope of the actual battles on the screen, but we don't want the player to get mired in detail. The battles play relatively quickly, and they don't overwhelm the rest of the game. It's basically the same

design philosophy we used in *Lords of the Realm*."

The design reflects simplicity, yes, but historical depth as well. There are ten different kinds of enemy armies deployed in the game. Some will be barbarian hordes, and some will be as disciplined as your own. Greeks, Parthians, Carthaginians, Huns, Germans, Picts — they're all here, and each foe fights in a historically plausible manner. "As you go from province to province," Foster con-



Two armies about to collide. Battles are fought either to defend against incursions or to subjugate unruly locals.

tinues, "we want you to be presented with different challenges, different styles of fighting, simply so the game never becomes stagnant.

"We have really strengthened the Province and Empire levels over what they were in the original game. Each province has a different profile — there's a careful linkage between the province resources and the city, and from one province to the next. With each basic element, we've been striving for smooth integration with all the other elements."

There are exquisitely rendered galleys and triremes dotting the game's harbors, and Impressions is hoping to incorporate a naval element into the



A thriving seaport means increased commerce and lots of fresh seafood in the regional cuisine.

Your first look at...



Hannibal ad portas!! The animated war elephants are delightful to behold, although somewhat unreliable in action.

The Emperor's New Clothes

Here's a run-down of the improvements made over the first *Caesar*.

- Super SVGA graphics
- All structures and soldiers are rendered with 3D-Studio.
- Better interface: all commands for each level are accessible from a single bank of icons. Pop-up menus help organize commands by grouping them under single icons as well. The function of each icon or command is also displayed on screen when the cursor touches it.
- Multimedia online help and reference material, with hypertext links for easy cross-referencing.
- Improved Empire Level: provinces are no longer assigned randomly, but may be selected as part of an overall strategy. Each province provides a significantly different set of challenges. For the ultimate test, there are also eight expert provinces in northern Europe, which Rome itself could not conquer, but the player can. These, *Impressions* promises, will be "very tough."
- Improved role-playing element: the player now has a much more tangible sense of building his or her own career, along with the Empire. There's much more interaction with the Emperor in Rome, lots of graphic handshakes as one's rank increases, and the delicious prospect of raising an elite personal guard.
- Vastly improved battle scenes: the micro-minia-tures system works well for this tactical period, and *Impressions* has taken great care to make battlefield action dramatic. Wait till you see those charging Carthaginian elephants!



The first *Caesar* featured coarse VGA graphics. *Caesar II* improves on those with hi-res SVGA.



Zoom out to obtain a view of all the farms, warehouses, and trading posts surrounding your city.



Behold the Circus Maximus! Say, is that Charlton Heston down there in the charioteer's tunic?

combat system. There's some debate about that feature, however, because the relative slowness of naval campaigns may bog down the title's overall pace.

At any time during the course of the game, you can visit the Forum and click on the various characters there to receive important information. Click on the Centurion, for instance, and you get an overview of your legions and how much it's costing to keep them in the field. Click on the Plebeian Tribune, and you can adjust the number of plebes and allocate them to specific tasks.

The latter statistics are important, for if you don't have enough plebeians for efficient city management, all kinds of problems will arise (like fires and water shortages).

Once your city is up and running, you can use the handy Query function to keep track of the details. Simply right-click on any structure and a pop-up window will appear, indicating the structure's function and its most press-


ing problems or needs. You can even click on individual citizens walking in the streets, and they'll respond by telling you their names and what their current concerns happen to be.

A help display is also available, offering strategy tips along with a detailed online history of the Roman Empire. Hyperlinks embedded in each help or history screen, as well as each query panel, will allow the user to wander through the generous reference material at leisure.

Perhaps the most obvious virtue of this elegant game is its appearance.

It's quite the most beautiful game *Impressions* has ever released. The model cities, with their graceful columns, heroic public buildings, formidable walls, and softly shining rivers, truly do suggest the grandeur that was Rome. A similar level of excellence prevails in the Province screens, with their smoothly textured landscapes, realistic hills, and towering alpine ramparts.

Caesar II should appeal to a wide audience, including strategy buffs, wargamers, and most especially, *SimCity* addicts. And for gamers who share my passion for the period, it's a dream-come-true sort of product. Incomplete though it was, the Alpha version alone was enough to make this plebe want to don his *lorica segmentata*, strap on his cassis, sharpen his gladius *Ibericus*, and shout *SPQR!* at the top of his lungs.



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Product Information Number 160

SU27 Flanker

Flying Russia's Latest and Most Powerful Fighter

By tapping into the talents of a skilled Russian design group, SSI may have hit the mother lode — the Mother Russia lode, that is.

—Joseph Novicki



Game: SU-27 Flanker
 Developer: The Fighter Collection
 Publisher: SSI, 675 Alamanor Ave., Sunnyvale, CA 94086
 (408) 737-6800
 Projected Price: TBA
 Percent Complete: 80%

In a nutshell:

Quality flight sims are rare. This one not only has the action and look required for a great sim, but it also includes the proper physics and feel of the SU-27 jet. And the ability to execute a mission as a General, not just a pilot, should appeal to wargamers as well as flight-sim fans.

What's so special?

The attention to detail puts this game in a class by itself. Plus, it doesn't sacrifice gameplay for looks.

Why should I care?

Whether you're into flight sims or not, it's exciting to see the first wave of quality gaming coming from Eastern European developers and producers.

And when's it coming out?

Christmas or 1st Quarter '96



SU27 has everything you could want and more — including a bomber run.

Our first peek at SU27 Flanker, during a recent trade show in L.A., had the air of some Cold War, cloak-and-dagger operation. We were ushered into a dark viewing booth, where we met two men — one speaking Russian, the other boasting a perfect 007 English accent. We all huddled around a monitor as if to guard government secrets — an impression that wasn't far off the mark.

What we saw was a flight sim with such devout attention to the details of real-world aerodynamics that we figured the development team must be composed of either obsessive fanatics or geniuses. It

turned out to be a little of both.

The James Bond-sounding fellow was project leader Nick Grey. Nick is a true fighter-plane enthusiast, and managing director of The Fighter Collection — one of the largest collections of WWII fighter planes in the world. He also manages a number of software companies in Eastern Europe, including the one that began developing SU27 nearly four years ago.

Four years is a long time in the world of software, and Grey knew he'd have to get the product to market soon; fortunately for him (and us), Grey ran into Jim Mackonochie, Mindscape UK's project manager and self-proclaimed flight sim fanatic. When Mackonochie found out about Grey's project, it seemed like the perfect match, and a deal was struck. All that remained was to finish the game.

Grey keeps very tight control over the look and feel of the project, "more by necessity than wish," he says. "The problem with a lot of the programmers is, though they're superb mathematicians, they're not actually pilots. You have to take a lot of information from test pilots to get not only the aerodynamics, but the sort of environmental feel of what's going on. The speed or head movement, the kind of inertia, and so on, might not be translated correctly on a very small screen."

The finished product will center on a very detailed mission editor. Sure, you

God is in the details...



From an external view, you can see the flaps and wheels move with the proper controls.



Ground units like this are armed, dangerous, and very technically accurate.



can hop in the SU27 and blast away anything you like, but with the editor you can create missions as a pilot, commander, or general. As pilot or commander you actually fly the mission. But as general, you set objectives and then sit back and watch the chaos.

The game will include pre-designed missions, too, based in and around the Crimean theater. Though the SU27 is the only plane you fly, there are many other planes to interact with (read "blast out of the sky"), as well as about a dozen different ground units and ships — all of which have their own working weapons systems crafted to exacting specifications.

"We had a lot of assistance from various Eastern European design bureaus and weapons manufacturers to give us very precise information on acceleration, inertia, burn time, size of detonation, and probability of kill," Grey says. "It's very helpful, and very unusual. You'll find data in SU27 that was very highly classified just five years ago, but which has become readily available from the manufacturers mainly because they're in dire financial situations. They have very few customers now, and are happy to talk about their hardware — which helps us

in increasing realism. It would be much more difficult to get this type of information in the west."

Grey got access to more than just technical specs in Eastern Europe, though. He also found top-rate scientists and mathematicians. In fact, most of the development team comes from the old Soviet aerospace industry, from what would be the equivalent of MIT in the U.S.

The graphic design is also being done in Russia, and marks one of the biggest departures from recent flight sims. Unlike most sims these days, many of which sacrifice frame rate for ground detail, SU27 has that clean, fast — and to us, preferable — look of a Chuck Yeager's *Air Combat*; some textures and shading on the main objects, and simple shaded polygons in most other cases.

The decision to stick with polygons came about because Grey and company wanted to achieve very realistic frame rates on most machines, even while running in SVGA mode. As too many new titles have demonstrated, a sim can look fantastic but fall flat if the frame rate isn't high enough to convey realism. Grey opted to make a sim that felt like the real thing, but then to make it a

Jumpin' Jets

Here are some of the many jets you'll have the pleasure of interacting with in SU27.



MiG 29 Flanker



F-16 Falcon



MiG 27 Flogger

game that most computer owners will be able to run on their machines.

"I certainly know, from reading your mag and others, that everyone is getting extremely frustrated at trying to run something that, even on a Pentium, ends up moving at five frames per second," Grey says. "So I think the graphics in SU27 will be satisfactory. As long as everything moves in the right way, and the eye is comfortable with the movement, then it all becomes believable."

You can count on more from Grey and The Fighter Collection, too. They have access to a lot more information on a variety of Russian aircraft. One idea is to create other plane-specific sims that can interact with SU27, so players can take advantage of The Fighter Collection's detailed recreations of individual aircraft while still enjoying the totality of the company's efforts.

When the next sims will come out, though, hasn't been announced. As for SU27 — which has the stuff to be one of the most accurate flight sims in years — it should be out by Christmas.

PCG



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Product Information Number 125



Move Over, Wing Commanders!

Origin begins production of new interactive movie

With sales of the interactive-movie extravaganza *Wing Commander III* topping the software charts across the globe, and production under way for *Wing Commander IV*, the folks at Origin Systems aren't about to give up on the interactive-movie thing anytime soon. In fact, they're preparing to launch another assault on the interactive warpath, with a project currently being developed in England.

The Darkening is being produced by 25-year-old Erin Roberts (yes, he's the brother of *Wing Commander* creator Chris Roberts), and it promises an even stronger mix of first-person flying action and movie-style story sequences than *WCIII*—with a few new twists of its own.

Set in an entirely new game universe, *The Darkening* boasts an impressive live-action cast, including Christopher Walken (*The Deer Hunter*, *Pulp Fiction*), John Hurt (*Alien*, *The Elephant Man*), Jürgen Prochnow (*Das Boot*, *Body of Evidence*), and David Warner (*Star Trek VI*). Filling out the cast are Clive Owen, Amanda Pays, Brian Blessed, David McCallum and Mathilda May.

The Darkening tells the story of Lev Aris, who awakens from cryogenic sleep with a case of amnesia and a handful of shady characters out to kill him. Taking control of Aris, the player



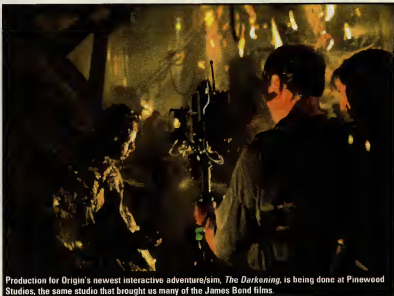
John Hurt makes his multimedia debut in *The Darkening* as Joe the Bartender. Let's hope he doesn't have to relive that stomach-bursting scene from *Alien*.

will interact with 50 characters and fly any of 16 different ships between eight fully-realized planets.

Roberts has designed a darkly complex new setting from the ground up. Open-ended gameplay lets you choose your own path through *The Darkening's* story; you can take flight as a mild-mannered trader (with the aid of wingmen to fight off enemies, of course); merely fly around and blast people in your way; or play private detective using e-mail, public records, and word-of-mouth to work your way out

the game's surprise ending.

"The technology we're using makes *Wing Commander III: Heart of the Tiger* look like a dinosaur," said Roberts, whose \$5 million budget is one of the



Production for Origin's newest interactive adventure/sim, *The Darkening*, is being done at Pinewood Studios, the same studio that brought us many of the James Bond films.

largest ever for a computer game (*Wing Commander IV* is rumored to be close to \$7 or \$8 million).

To be specific, the game's two and a half hours of movie sequences are being shot on 16mm film, which will be

translated to CD-ROM via Digital Beta, a new format that Roberts says is far superior to the Beta SP format used for *Wing III*. *The Darkening* will also use a stripped-down SVGA graphics engine, more compact and faster than the one used in *Wing Commander III*.



The cinematic style of storytelling that was used in *Wing Commander III* takes a strange new turn in *The Darkening*.

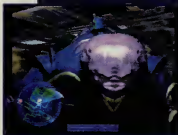
The Darkening began filming in May under the direction of Steve Hilliker of London's Nelson Films. The footage is being shot at England's Pinewood Studios, home to the James Bond films. The game is scheduled for release early next year.

"The technology we're using makes *Wing Commander III* look like a dinosaur."

Erin Roberts, producer of *The Darkening*

UNDER CONSTRUCTION

When the long, hot dog days of summer begin to shorten and the leaves on the trees start turning brown, you can be certain of one thing: the software publishers are starting to gear up for the ever-important holiday buying season. And after taking a look at some of the new titles headed our way, it looks like this holiday season may be the best yet.



Get ready for more dark and dreary action of *Space Hulk* in the sequel due out this fall.

Space Hulk: Vengeance of the Blood Angels

A little over a year ago, Electronic Arts struck a chord with science-fiction and strategy fans with their cult hit *Space Hulk*. Now EA is putting the final touches on the sequel, *Space Hulk: Vengeance of the Blood Angels*.

Like the first *Space Hulk*, *Vengeance* is a clever adaptation of Games Workshop's 40,000K miniatures game, where you lead a team of Terminator Space Marines through the dark passages of enormous derelict starships called "space hulks" in order to purify them from the scourge of the Genestealers.

It looks like the sequel should more than satisfy fans of the original, with an updated story line and a host of new improvements like full

Continued on page 43

High Seas Merger

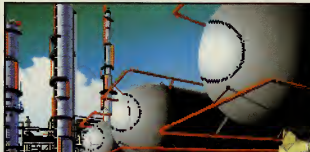
Sierra acquires Impressions Software

Sierra On-Line, makers of the wildly popular King's Quest and Space Quest series, recently announced they've acquired Impressions Software, creators of the popular strategy titles *Front Lines*, *High Seas Trader*, and *Powerhouse*. [Ed. Note: See our review of *Powerhouse* on page 105 of this issue.]

The acquisition comes as no surprise to the folks at Impressions, who had been searching for a suitable ally to give them a larger presence in the marketplace.

"We've been looking for a strategic alliance to give us a better position in the marketplace for some time, and we're confident the relationship with Sierra will allow us to continue to produce the type of games we want," Impressions director of marketing Chris Foster said.

Over at Sierra, they're excited about the opportunities as well, and plan to add Impressions' strategy titles to their line of action, adventure, and simulation software.



Backed by Sierra's big-time marketing resources, Impressions' fall lineup, including *Powerhouse*, should be easy to find at your local software store.

"The success of *Outpost* made us believers in the strategy game category, and Impressions' *Caesar II* is one of the best strategy games I've seen in a long time," said Sierra chairman Ken Williams. "We're excited to add titles of this quality to our product line." [Ed. Note: See our Scoop of *Caesar II* on page 32 of this issue.]

Impressions' President David Lester has high hopes for the union as well, and says, "Sierra's top-notch development resources, together with their distribution

strength, were key elements in our decision to join forces. We look forward to working together and delivering high-quality titles under the Sierra brand name."

Most importantly, the relationship shouldn't have any impact on the types of titles we'll be seeing from Impressions. As Foster put it, his company will retain "autonomy and creative control over our products," allowing the company to continue developing the same kinds of unique games that drew Sierra to them in the first place.

Magic Kingdom Expands

Disney Interactive teams up with 7th Level

The Disney division responsible for the best-selling roller-coaster simulation *Coaster* and the high-flying *Stunt Island* has entered a partnership with 7th Level Inc., publishers of *TuneLand* starring Howie Mandel, *Monty Python's Complete Waste of Time* and *Take Your Best Shot* to produce a line of multimedia titles based on Disney licenses.

"Disney brings a quality of storytelling and a library of popular characters and stories that are unmatched in this business," 7th Level President George Grayson said. "This collaboration presents unlimited opportunities for 7th Level and countless new ways to use our animation production systems in both the cre-



For an example of 7th Level's animation technology, take a look at their demo of *Battle Beast* on this month's PC Gamer CD.

ative and technical areas."

The first product of this new union will be an as-yet-untilted arcade/action game based on Pumbaa and Timon, the irreplaceable characters from Dis-

ney's smash-hit *The Lion King*. Artists and producers from Disney will work with the design team from 7th Level to co-create the title. 7th Level wants to use its state-of-the-art animation technology for high-speed action games with visual quality exceeding that of television.

Steve McBeth, president of Disney Interactive, said, "Titles like the Pumbaa and Timon game will take advantage of this technology for fast action, arcade-style gaming on CD-ROM."

The Pumbaa and Timon game will be designed for players ages 8 and older. Disney Interactive will distribute the product, releasing the title in the U.S. in November 1995 and internationally in Spring 1996.

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*Some restrictions apply. Must be over 18 years of age to subscribe. For games to be free of charge for up to 17 hours, user must observe the following: play in non-peak time (between 6PM and 8AM EST); excess speed must be set at a minimum of 2800 baud; user must dial into a local access node; credits only to gaming sites. Otherwise, normal GENIE usage fees may be incurred during the 17 hour complimentary period. This offer is in lieu of all other offers, and is for new subscribers only. Additional long distance phone charges may apply. Available in US and Canada only. Offer expires 12/31/95.

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A Partnership for Better Rendering

"Wild Bill" Stealey's Interactive Magic goes gunning for new technology

Never satisfied with "good enough," Interactive Magic — known for simulations and strategy games like *Apache Longbow* and *Exploration* — has just entered into an agreement with Numerical Design, Ltd. to develop a new high-speed graphics rendering system.

Interactive Magic hopes to use the new system to add even more detail and clarity to their simulation games.

"We want people playing our flight simulation games to feel as though the wind is whistling through their hair," said Interactive Magic's chairman, J.W. "Wild Bill" Stealey.

Stealey, a graduate of the U.S. Air Force Academy, is best known as the founder and former chairman of sim legend MicroProse Software.

Numerical Design, Ltd. has



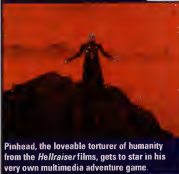
With the development of a new rendering system, Interactive Magic hopes to make games like their *Apache Longbow* much more detailed and realistic.

developed rendering programs such as *Rendition* and *rPlus*, used in CAD, animation, and illustration applications. NDL won the 1992 MacWorld World Class Award for the best-selling Macintosh graphics application with *Dimensions*, which was devel-

oped for Adobe Systems.

"The addition of their expertise will give us the edge we've been pushing for in this industry," said Doug Kubel, Interactive Magic's vice president of engineering and technology.

Continued from page 40.....
freedom of movement for each of the marines, new sound effects, and improved graphics. Expect *Vengeance of the Blood Angels* sometime in November.

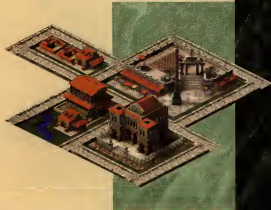


Pinhead, the loveable torturer of humanity from the *Hellraiser* films, gets to star in his very own multimedia adventure game.

Hellraiser: Virtual Hell

Fans who can't get enough of the characters in Clive Barker's demented *Hellraiser* films, books and comics will definitely want to take a look at the interactive adventure *Hellraiser: Virtual Hell*. Coming from 20th Century Fox Interactive and Magnet Interactive, *Hellraiser* is being designed with full 360-degree

Continued on page 44



VENI,
VIDI,
VICI.

(I came, I saw, I looked great in a toga.)

Continued from page 43

mobility and film-quality visuals with real-time interactivity. The designers promise to incorporate as much of Barker's distinctive horror world as they can cram on a CD-ROM. We're not sure if the game can live up to the twisted vision of the films, but then again, it does include Pinhead. Available in the first quarter of '96.



The top-down perspective of *Trophy Bass* may not be as attractive as Amtek's *Gone Fishing*, but it does give a good view of the fish.

Trophy Bass

Grab your pole! No wait, we're just talking about doing a little fishing here, computer style. Slated for fall release, Sierra On-Line's first-ever fishing simulation is getting the final touches from its

Continued on page 46

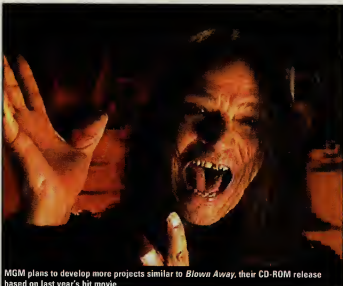
MGM Goes Interactive

Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer joins the Hollywood invasion

Yet another big-name movie studio is tossing its hat into the multimedia ring. MGM has formed MGM Interactive, which will initially produce titles for the PC and Mac CD-ROMs platforms. MGM Interactive plans to produce titles for other platforms in the near future, and may possibly do a project for the Sega system this year. The development of titles will primarily be in-house, using a small in-house staff who will work with outside developers.

The focus will be on products that evolve from MGM or United Artists properties, continuing the trend started by IVI Publishing with last year's release of the *Blown Away* CD-ROM, based on the hit movie. This year, MGM has released a CD-ROM based on the movie *Rob Roy*. The title covered the making of the movie, introduced the actors and staff from the movie, and also gave a brief history and overview of Scotland, where the movie took place. MGM/UA is also working with GTE Interactive on the development of a game base on the UA film *Tank Girl*.

While MGM has plenty of



MGM plans to develop more projects similar to *Blown Away*, their CD-ROM release based on last year's hit movie.

content to draw on for its titles, it also plans to develop titles based on original ideas. If the ideas are successful, MGM may develop those ideas in other media, such as animation, film, and television.

"MGM Interactive will continue a pattern of developing high-quality interactive titles with a focus on strong plot lines, engaging character development, and superior production values," said Ronald Frankel, MGM Interactive's newly appointed executive vice presi-

dent and general manager. "With the recent growth in the installed base of personal computers, vigorous popular demand for high-quality interactive products now can justify the investment MGM Interactive intends to make in creative development, production, and marketing."

Distribution of all of the products will be through MGM/UA Home Entertainment. The first titles will ship this year, with six to 10 titles scheduled for release in 1996.

TEMPUS FUGIT

(Time flies, or my sundial is fast)



CARPE DIEM

(Seize this game)

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IBM PC screenshots may vary

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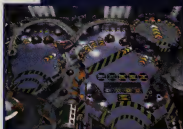
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Continued from page 44.....
designers as you read this. We were able to take a quick peek at *Trophy Bass* during Sierra's recent press tour, and though it was still in early form, the fishing action looked promising.

You'll have a wide array of lines, lures, and rod-and-reel combinations to ensure you'll be able to catch the big ones with little trouble. And as a bonus to die-hard fishing fans, you'll be able to play the game as a fishing tournament on real-world lakes, similar to the popular B.A.S.S. Masters competition.



If you didn't find the strategy elements of *Outpost* very palatable, but enjoyed its classy visuals, then check out Sierra's new pinball game set in *Outpost's* sci-fi world.

3D Ultra Pinball

Since we've spent more time and quarters than we care to count playing the silver ball (especially at lunchtime), we're always on the lookout for a good computer pinball game that can offer the same challenge without the need for loosed change. And it looks like Sierra's *3D Ultra Pinball* might just be the perfect choice. With its unique angled view of the table that allows you to see all the action (without the scrolling of games like *21st Century's Pinball Fantasies*), the action of *3D Ultra Pinball* feels a lot more realistic than most computer pinball games. And in an unusual move, Sierra has brought back

.....Continued on page 48

Operation Air Wolf

Lupine Online columnist gets a 6-G reality check

Although I've flown thousands of victorious dogfights in fighter craft ranging from World War I ragbats to the exotic interceptors of the Star Wars universe, they were all mere computer simulations, often with cheat codes and invincibility options in full effect. But all that cheating came back to haunt me when I finally got the chance to apply my flight experience in the real world.

On Sunday, June 11th, I took control of a fully aerobatic SIAL Marchetti SF260, and got my ass kicked in four out of seven mock dogfights with another wannabe Ace — all under the expert observation and tutelage of two instructor pilots from Air Combat U.S.A., a Fullerton, CA-based operation that allows anyone with \$695 to become a Fighter Pilot For a Day.

Mission briefing was at 7 a.m. sharp, where gear was fitted (flight suit, helmet, and parachute) and basic fighter maneuvers, air combat maneuvering, rules of engagement and, most important, safety, were covered before heading out to the twin Marchettis waiting on the ramp.

The instructor pilots sit side-by-side with the students, each with a familiar F-4 style control stick, although the IPs controlled the throttle throughout the flight. They also control the switcher for the three VCR cameras mounted in the cockpit: one looking forward over your shoulder, one looking across at you, and one through the gunsight.

The IPs — USAF F-16C pilot Ron "Maynard" Milligan and Marine EA-6B driver Mike "Grinch" Snuffer — handled the formation take-off and got us headed for the combat zone, about 25 miles northwest of Chicago, before passing the respective sticks to myself and fellow amateur Ken "Trade Show" Broadbent.

As we ascended to 3600 feet, Ken formed on my wing and we then took turns practicing high and low yo-yos and gunsight tracking before taking it up to 6000 feet, where the fights began.



Our fearless online columnist after he flew in head-to-head combat in a bitter dogfight with Ken "Trade Show" Broadbent.

After a head-on left/left pass, the IPs shouted "Fight's On!" and we started yanking "and cranking". I pulled into a hard left and managed to get Ken in my sights almost immediately. My flight-sim experience prepared me well for the spinning horizon but not for the G forces, and I began to feel as heavy as Jabba the Hut as I kept Ken lined up, trigger depressed, long enough for Maynard to call out "Tracking...tracking...tracking," followed by a plume of white smoke coming from Ken's plane, signifying a kill.

Fight Number 2 was a brilliant illustration of the "Lose sight, Lose the fight" principle. I did both, and Maynard had to crack open the canopy to dispel the smoke from Ken's victory.

I took it into the vertical plane for Fight 3, looping over the top and shaking like crazy with the stall "tickle" before nailing Ken a second time. But no smoke this time; aircraft 204 had an electrical problem that also shut down the VCR in Ken's plane.

While Grinch worked on the problem, I got to fly some bonus aerobatics — aileron roll, loop, barrel roll, Cuban 8, Immelman, hammerhead stall and a split S into another loop — after which Maynard demonstrated a stall/spin and let us pirouette three times before recovering.

With 204 back in action (it was just the alternator switch), I proceeded to crash through the

2500 foot hard deck ("There's 6 G's!" exclaimed Maynard, losing Fight 4 and Fight 5 when I lost sight of Ken again. Pulling straight over the top and rolling right, I tied the fighting score in Fight 6, confirmed by 204's now-functioning smoke.

All hell broke loose in Fight 7 as the IPs kept quiet and let Ken and I fight on our own. Betrayed again by "cheating" in all those sims, I ran us out of airspace in a series of loops and turns that crashed us through the hard deck again at barely 100 kts. "You were an animal!" said Maynard, laughing. Where Speed Is Life, though, I was a dead animal.

My simulator training showed off most when we were flying formation back to the FBO. "You're really smooth," remarked Maynard. "You can tell all those computer games have paid off." Debriefing consisted of watching both tapes, synched simultaneously, and laughing a lot (you get to keep the tape, too).

I'm still buzzed from the Air Combat experience, and it's already inspired my sim skills (just ask the Abbeville Boys of *Chuck Yeager Air Combat*). And I've promised myself that I'll never fly with cheats enabled again.

Well, maybe not never...

—Scott Wolf

[Ed. Note: Air Combat U.S.A. has Deployment Locations in 18 American cities. Call (800) 522-7590 for more info.]

Space Bucks



Build the Intergalactic Express!

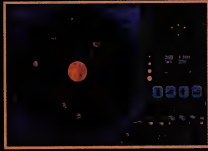
Space Bucks will be to the 22nd century what Railroad Barons were to the last! Blast off to the deepest stellar reaches where you and three opponents compete for intergalactic transit control. **Design and build futuristic spaceships** on your selected star system. Acquire landing rights and **run exotic cargo** and alien passengers to the remotest edge of the galaxy (for profit of course!). Establish a network of routes, but beware: space transport can be a dirty business - **sabotaging opponents or offering bribes** just might put you on top (or on the bottom!). And did we mention the **space pirates??**



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- Alien Races
- Random Galaxy Generator
- Difficulty Levels



SIERRA

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BRI PC screenshots only.

Product Information Number 118

Continued from page 46.....
 the artistic style of their strategy game *Outpost* to make up the "theme" for this new table. While this isn't exactly a bonus, it is very attractive. Expect *3D Ultra Pinball* some time in November.

OMF Enhanced

With its solid gameplay and wicked animations, Epic MegaGames' arcade fighter *One Must Fall: 2097* took the PC crowd by storm late last year. Now Epic is working on the sequel, *One Must Fall Enhanced*.

The name is a bit misleading: *OMF Enhanced* isn't merely an upgrade, but a full-fledged sequel to the original that'll feature all-new hand-drawn animations, a new storyline, new characters, and more special moves than you can shake a stick at.

If *OMF Enhanced* plays as well as the original, you can expect to spend a lot of time at your computer when it's released in the fall.

More Power!

Intel does it again with 133MHz Pentium

Always one to improve on the old and encourage folks to move into the future of computing, Intel has introduced a newer, faster, better processor to their successful Pentium lineup. The 133MHz Pentium processor is now available, and is aimed at high-end desktop and high-performance server use. With the release of this chip, the family of Pentium processors now claims nine members in all, with speeds and costs to suit a variety of consumers and applications.

This is the second product based on Intel's advanced 0.35 micron, 3.3 volt technology (the

first was a mobile version of the 90MHz Pentium, released in early June for use in laptops and notebook PCs). The 133MHz chip delivers more than twice the speed of the original 60MHz Pentium released back in 1993.

Senior vice president of Intel's desktop products group Carl Everett explained that the new chip will have an impact on a large segment of the computing market.

"End-users in business and home market segments are moving quickly to systems based on the fastest Pentium processors," Everett said.

Sales revenues for Pentium

chips exceeded those of 486 chips in the first quarter of 1995. By the end of the year, Intel expects the 75MHz and 90MHz chips to be the entry-level chip in most manufacturers' PC lines. The 100MHz and 120MHz chips will hold the middle ground, and the 133MHz processor will be at the high end.

Sold in 1,000-piece quantities, the processor is priced at \$335 each, with baseline multimedia systems expected to ship at slightly less than \$400. For more information about Intel and their products, check out their World Wide Web site at URL <http://www.intel.com/>.

The PC Gamer Playlist

In preparing this month's and last month's features on Windows 95, we've been testing every game we can get our hands on with Microsoft's new operating system. Some of the more persnickety games have taken a little more tweaking than others, but everything has gone pretty smoothly so far. Best of all, our rigorous testing has given us an excuse to waste even more

time than usual playing games. This month's Playlist is populated by those games we mysteriously felt the need to keep "testing" long after we'd gotten them up and running under Win 95.

1. *Full Throttle*/Matt, Dan, Lisa, Carol
2. *Apache Longbow*/Mike, Dean, Dan
3. *FX Fighter*/Carol, Dan, Todd, Mike

4. *Magic Carpet*/Todd, Dan, Joe, Lisa
5. *Mechwarrior 2*/Joe, Todd, Mike, Dan
6. *Gone Fishin'*/Bill, Matt, Joe, Lisa
7. *X-COM: Terror from the Deep*/Dan, Lisa
8. *Terminal Velocity*/Bill, Matt, Todd
9. *Hi-Octane*/Matt, Dean, Carol, Joe
10. *ST:TNC: A Final Unity*/Dan, Mike, Lisa

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Origin, Electronic Arts, and Jane's — the name in military reference works — are teaming up to create a new line of the best, most accurate flight sims any of us have ever seen.

.....

by Dan Bennett

The great thing about the PC gaming industry is that it's still so young; the "what-if" factor is very much alive in it. Someone says "What if ...," and they're not immediately met with a legion of corporate suits eager to explain why it can't be done.

For example: Someone said "What if we teamed the biggest talents in air combat sims with the most respected name in military reference works, and created a whole new line of deadly serious simulations?" And Jane's Combat Simulations was born.

Never mind that the talents in question were working at two different companies in two distant cities. Never mind that Jane's is a very old British company that has never produced a single PC game. Never mind that they already had a distribution agreement with a huge corporation that had its own line of computer games.

None of those obstacles mattered, because it was an exciting idea. And in the PC gaming industry, excitement still carries a lot of weight.

So just how excited should PC pilots be? Just consider the principal characters in this story: Origin's Andy Hollis, a MicroProse alumnus who worked on *Gunship*, *F-19 Stealth Fighter*, and the second and third *F-15 Strike Eagle* games; Electronic Arts' Paul Grace, who helped create *LHX Attack Chopper*, *Chuck Yeager Air Combat* and *U.S. Navy Fighters*; and Jane's Information Group, the world's foremost authority on the hardware of war and publishers of *Jane's All the World's Aircraft*.

We should be very excited.

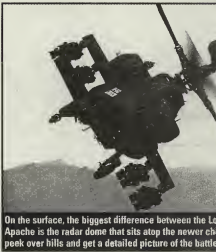
THE JANE'S CONNECTION

It all started when Grace called his friend

Charlie Lillis at Thompson Publishing, the publishers of the Jane's periodicals, hoping to score some free reference materials for his next project. Turned out, Lillis was already in a gaming frame of mind, and the conversation turned to the benefits of an alliance between Jane's, EA, and Origin.

"It seemed absolutely perfect," Grace said in a recent interview.

So he and Lillis hammered out the



On the surface, the biggest difference between the *Langbow* and the *Apache* is the radar dome that sits atop the newer chopper, letting it peek over hills and get a detailed picture of the battlefield.

that company has its own line of PC games (Virgin Interactive), and since it's a much bigger corporation than Electronic Arts, Grace was anxious to push the Jane's deal through as quietly as possible. Good ideas are still welcome in the PC gaming industry, but they're also carefully guarded.

"So the last thing I did was talk to the executives about it," Grace said jokingly.

Once all that legal wrangling was out of the way, the members of the new sims line, Jane's

Combat Simulations, were free to get down to the real business of making games — and there are some terrific ones already in the works, thanks in part to the wealth of information Jane's brings to the table.

Of course, any game designer could crack open the latest edition of *All the World's Aircraft* or *Jane's Defense Weekly* and get fairly up-to-date infor-

ABOVE



mation on the machines he was simulating. But the new alliance means Grace, Hollis, and their teams have access to all of Jane's resources: not just the books, but on-line databases and living, breathing analysts.

"If I can get the accuracy and data from Jane's and talk to some of their writers, I can bring something special to the consumer," Grace said.

The Jane's name will also bring a weight of authority to the alliance's products that no other flight sims have had, Hollis said. "Customers will be able to identify with it and know what it means," Grace continued. "And, really, what it means is quality. These are top-shelf simulations with a high degree of authenticity."

HARD-CORE HELOS

The first product of the Origin-EA-Jane's alliance will be *AH-64D Longbow*, an in-depth simulation of the Army's high-tech attack helicopter. The *Longbow* is a state-of-the-art update of McDonnell Douglas' combat-proven Apache, and Andy Hollis' game will include painstaking representations of the chopper's

ultra-advanced radar and avionics.

Of course, a game is only as realistic as the information available to the designers, Hollis told me during my visit to Origin's headquarters for a sneak-peek at *Longbow*.

"One of the things I look at very carefully when we try to decide what kind of vehicle to simulate is how much

information is available about it," Hollis said. "For instance, we've toyed with the idea of doing an F-22 simulator at some point; problem is, right now there's not a lot of information available about it that's not classified. You could do a hypothetical simulation, but I prefer to do one where we know more. If a player knows you're showing him the real thing and believes

you, then he's into it."

That's where the Jane's connection comes in handy.

"It has done so much for us — even beyond our wildest expectations — and it's only been a couple of weeks since we signed," Hollis said. "It's just a really, tremendously valuable relationship. It's going to make the games that much more



Longbow opens with a 3D-rendered battle sequence that makes McDonnell Douglas' promotional videos for the AH-64D look like student films.

believable, that much more realistic."

That realism is aided by texture-mapped Super VGA graphics that put every current air combat simulation to shame. Hollis and his team put in long hours just making sure Longbow's 3D graphics engine could do justice to the detailed sim they were planning.

The game would need "full-rolling

terrain" — that's designer-speak for a landscape that continuously and smoothly changes elevations, the way terrain does in the real world. The time-honored flight sim tradition of dropping the occasional polygon mountain on a flat landscape — what Hollis calls "hills stuck on a billiard table" — wouldn't do in a sim that modeled the Longbow's ability to take tactical advantage of hills and valleys.

The team considered using a system similar to the "voxel-

space" engine that gave NovaLogic's *Comanche: Maximum Overkill* its unique look. Hollis said. But that kind of system doesn't allow rolls or steep climbs and dives, so it wasn't appropriate to a helicopter as agile as the Longbow. So ultimately, the Longbow team had to build a new 3D system from the ground up.

"This is a completely-from-scratch engine," he said proudly. "No code from anything else is in this thing."

FLIGHT SCHOOL

Of course, every bit of realism comes at a price. Hard-core detail might make a flight sim more satisfying in the end, but it also makes the game that much harder to get into.

No one knows better than the creator of *F-15 Strike Eagle III* how daunting today's sophisticated simulators can be to an inexperienced gamer. They don't call the F-15 the "Starship" for



This photo-realistic high-res Army base acts as the game's main menu.



You get your mission briefings in super-detailed ready rooms like this one. Your surroundings will change depending on what part of the world you're in.

Machines of Grace

More wonders from Jane's

As Andy Hollis and company continue work on *Longbow*, Paul Grace and his team at Electronic Arts are developing another air combat sim worthy of the new Jane's brand.

Advanced Tactical Fighters will take advantage of Jane's vast resources of barely-declassified information to simulate six cutting-edge implements of destruction:

- The F-117A Nighthawk, the stealth fighter of Persian Gulf War fame.
- The French Rafale, Europe's hot new fighter.
- The B-2 Spirit, the controversial all-wing stealth bomber.
- The X-31, a fighter capable of vectored flight.

- A fighter version of the X-29, an agile jet with forward-swept wings.
- The ASTOVL (Advanced Short Take off and Vertical Landing) fighter, the successor to the Harrier.

ATF will be based on an update of the *U.S. Navy Fighters* engine, but will incorporate detailed information and artwork from *Jane's All the World's Aircraft*. That means gorgeous SVGA graphics and the chance to learn about and fly the most advanced warplanes in the world — some of which are still on the drawing board.

In addition to the sexy new aircraft, the sim will also include some near-future weapons like lasers designed to blind enemy pilots; the rear-firing "backwinder" missile, sure to be a nasty surprise for that MiG on your six; and the AIM-9X, a new version of the venerable Sidewinder missile that can lock on a target 90 degrees off your plane's nose.

Although it's a part of the Jane's line,

Grace says ATF will be a very different game from Hollis' *Longbow*, owing to the two designers' different philosophies. While Hollis likes to simulate one aircraft in great detail, Grace says he prefers to give players a more general feel for several different machines.

"Andy tends toward the depth approach, where you do one craft, but you do it six times deeper," Grace said. "What I enjoy most is the air-to-air combat part, and that is most interest-



ATF will feature the same Super VGA graphics that made *U.S. Navy Fighters* a visual knockout.

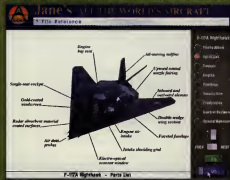
log when the aircraft are different."

Grace admits that simulating a wide range of aircraft usually means sacrificing some detail in the game, but he doesn't see that as a problem.

"My emphasis is on getting the experience right," he said. "What I'm simulating is not an F-14; I'm trying to simulate the combat experience of an experienced pilot. He just sees the information he needs, not a particular radar mode."

It's hard to argue with that approach, since it has led to games like *U.S. Navy Fighters* and *Chuck Yeager Air Combat*, arguably the most entertaining straight air-combat sim ever.

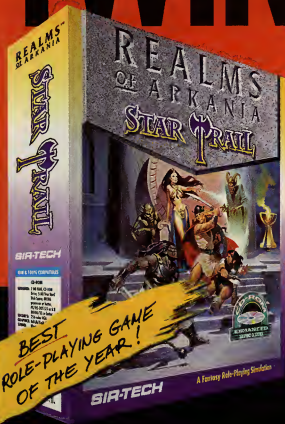
Grace says the one thing all the products from Jane's Combat Simulations will have in common is quality. And judging from the line's first two games, that just may be the understatement of the year.



Jane's All the World's Aircraft brings a wealth of hard information to *Advanced Tactical Fighters*.

TWIN

PEAKS



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Product Information Number 147

Knights of the Sky

Paul Grace and Andy Hollis, the principal designers developing the Jane's line, have a combined background that reads like a history of air combat simulations. Check out the highlights of their careers, and you'll see why this new alliance is such great news for flight sim fans.

Andy Hollis



- **MIG Alley Ace:** An early MicroProse product, this was the first two-player air combat simulation (it used a split screen rather than a modem or network connection).
- **Gunship:** The first air combat sim to use 3D polygon graphics. Also established most of the air combat sim conventions, like mission briefings; evaluations; promotions; and medals.
- **F-19 Stealth Fighter:** Featured greatly improved 3D polygon graphics and much greater strategic depth.
- **F-15 Strike Eagle II:** "Rambo in the sky," applied F-19's graphics and sounds to an action-oriented air-combat extravaganza.
- **F-15 Strike Eagle III:** With its detailed avionics and texture-mapped graphics, it's still one of the most realistic sims around.

Paul Grace



- **Chuck Yeager's Advanced Flight Trainer:** Early use of polygon graphics; featured multiple aircraft and in-flight stunt training.
- **F-16 Combat Pilot:** One of the first air combat sims to feature a wingman.
- **LHX:** Hypothetical simulation of the Army's Light Helicopter Experiment, which led to the Comanche attack chopper. Also included the UH-60 Blackhawk and the V-22 Osprey, a helicopter/airplane hybrid. Sadly underrated by gamers and reviewers.
- **Yeager Air Combat:** Simulated combat in three arenas: World War Two; Korea; and Vietnam. Allowed players to mix eras for some intriguing dogfights.
- **U.S. Navy Fighters:** Depicted contemporary naval warplanes in stunning Super VGA graphics.

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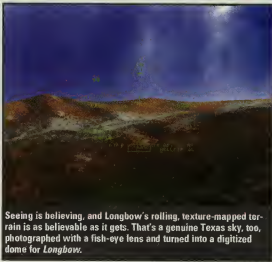
nothing, it's one of the most complex weapons platforms in the world. Hollis got around the *Strike Eagle* problem by offering graduated levels of realism; gamers could start with almost arcade-like simplicity, moving up to more authentic representations of the F-15E's radar and weapons systems when they felt they were ready for more of a challenge.

"That was one of the first games to really go whole-hog on the avionics stuff," Hollis said. "But at the same time, we provided alternatives, simpler versions of the flight modeling, so players could work into it easily." The system worked incredibly well, making *Strike Eagle III* not just one of the most realistic air combat sims yet, but one of the most enjoyable.

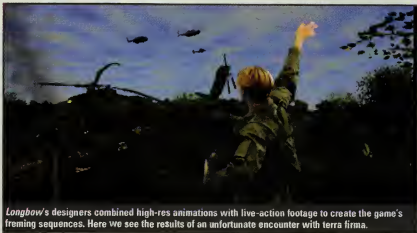
That same philosophy is going into *Longbow*, but this time Hollis and his team are doing *Strike Eagle III* one better by actually offering a

series of interactive lessons designed to get gamers airborne and into the action in record time.

In *Longbow*'s tutorial area, players progress through eight levels of flight training, from Basic Flight through



Seeing is believing, and *Longbow*'s rolling, texture-mapped terrain is as believable as it gets. That's a genuine Texas sky, too, photographed with a fish-eye lens and turned into a digitized dome for *Longbow*.

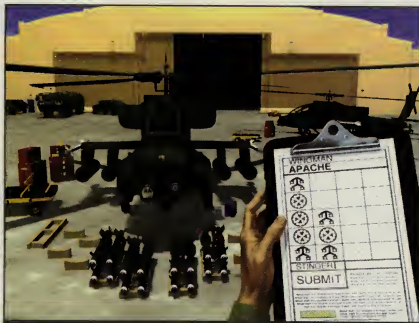


Longbow's designers combined high-res animations with live-action footage to create the game's framing sequences. Here we see the results of an unfortunate encounter with terra firma.



**TIME
STANDS**





You choose the weapons loadout for your and your wingman's helicopters on this screen. Call us excessive, but if it weren't for pesky ol' gravity, we'd choose those 16 Hellfire missiles every time.



A *Longbow* chopper swoops down on a trio of hangars. Note the two multi-function display screens that replace the Apache's analog gauges.

Radar and Weapons Systems to Strategy and Tactics. The digitized voice of an instructor pilot — portrayed by no less than the head of Apache training at Fort Hood, not far from Origin HQ — coaches you through each lesson in detail: push this button to start the engines, watch this gauge until it reaches 300 ft, push forward on the stick, etc.

"Meanwhile, it's watching what you're doing," Hollis said. "If you don't do what you should, it makes the suggestion again, a little more emphatically. And if you *still* don't do it, eventually it'll just do it for you. If you do it right, though, it reinforces that with positive feedback.

"It's all highly interactive," Hollis said. "Our goal is for you to be able to fly the regular missions and complete one or two of them without ever opening the manual. If we can achieve that, then we win."

THE SKUNK WORKS

Based on Origin's first few sorties into the world of air combat, hardcore simmers might be a little skeptical about *Longbow*. The company's *Strike Commander* and *Wings of Glory* both left a lot to be desired in the area of realism, while *Pacific Strike* had technical problems that seriously damaged Origin's reputation as a producer of combat sims. Some gamers are bound to raise an eyebrow when they hear that a serious attack helicopter simulation is being designed in Austin. But strictly speaking, *Longbow* isn't an Origin product, and it looks like it'll resemble those Origin games about as closely as an F-16 resembles the Wright Brothers' flyer.

Hollis correctly points out that Origin's earlier air combat games can be very entertaining, as long as gamers don't think of them as serious simulations. But even as they released *Strike Commander*, the folks in Austin had their minds on hard-core flight sim fans who won't settle for anything less than the utmost in realism. That's why they brought Andy Hollis to Texas a couple of years ago and let him create his own team, affectionately named for the real-world group responsible for some of the U.S. military's most advanced, top-secret machines.

"We call it the 'Skunk

Works," Hollis said. "Most of Origin didn't even know for a long time what was going on over here."

In keeping with its more realistic approach, *Longbow* won't follow the "interactive movie" model that characterized Origin's other flight sims, in which a movie-like story unfolded between combat missions. Hollis prefers to think of his game as an "interactive documentary," as you progress through a campaign in *Longbow*, the impact of your actions on the war are revealed through videotaped TV news clips.

THE FUN FACTOR

For all its realism, *Longbow* still promises to be a classic Andy Hollis product. Gamers who've played Hollis' earlier sims know what to expect from him: a nearly perfect balance of realism and fun.

Entertainment is still foremost in Hollis' mind. He knows that all the detail in the world won't matter if a game feels like a week in boot camp; no one's going to admire the convincing radar systems if operating them is too much like work.

Despite its impressive pedigree, *AH-64D Longbow* is still a game, and judging from what we've seen so far, it's going to be a blast.

"That's the bottom line, at the end of the day," Hollis said. "We don't ship it unless it's a fun game. Period."

PCG



Looks like a bad day for the U.S. Army. When all of your pilots are replaced by those neatly folded flags, you know things are going badly.



In addition to training flights, single missions and campaigns, gamers can fly historical missions from *Desert Storm* and *Just Cause*, the operations that gave the AH-64 its first real combat trials.

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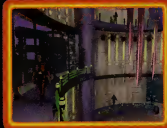
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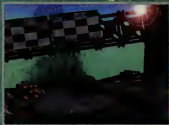
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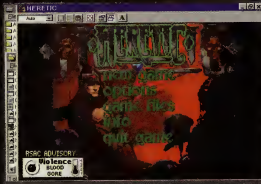
Running your DOS games under Windows 95

.....
by Charles Brannon

It's August 25th, and you rush out to grab your very own copy of Windows 95. You get it home, install it, and... what?

For the first few months, there won't be a lot of new games — games written specifically for Windows 95 — to choose from. So most of us are going to have to try something we've always been told (or have learned through painful experience) to avoid: We're going to be running DOS games under Windows.

Fortunately, Windows 95 is designed to work fairly well with DOS products. So you'll still be able to play those old favorites, although the way you go about launching them may not be quite the same.



Until games are written specifically for Windows 95, you'll need to learn how to run your DOS games under a new set of rules. In the next few pages, we'll show you how.

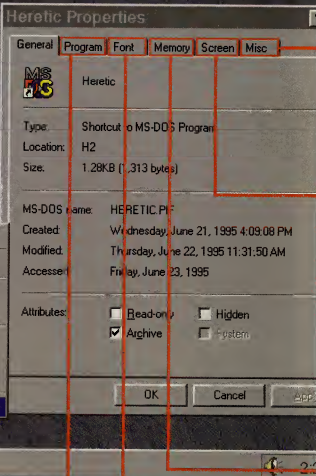
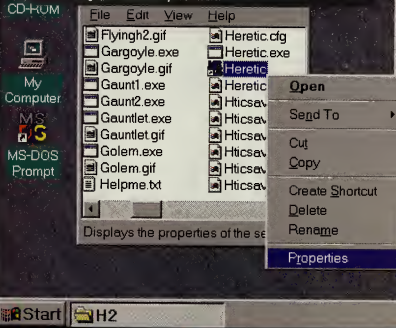
Properties: The DOS Gamer's Best Friend

With the new features of Windows 95, you'll find that many DOS games will run by simply double-clicking on the game's .EXE file. However, some games simply won't run because you aren't getting the best operating environment for your game. But, by tweaking the game's Properties, you can set up the proper environment, and get up and gaming in no time.

The easiest way to access the Properties for a game is to locate the program itself, using Explorer or My Computer. Open the directory folder containing the game and look for the game's .EXE file (the command you normally type at a DOS prompt), then right-click on it and choose Properties from the pop-up menu. You can also highlight the file, then choose Properties from the folder's File menu.

If the game is already up and running under Windows 95, you may want to tweak the Properties anyway. Use the Alt+Enter keyboard combination to put the DOS game in a window. Then simply click on the Properties button on the MS-DOS toolbar to get at the property settings we'll discuss here.

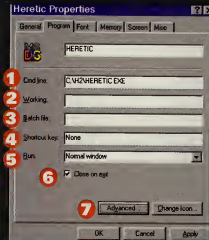
The property settings are contained in four separate "pages," or panels, each with a tab heading. We'll skip past the first page, the General tab heading, (seen here at the right), which is merely informative.



Program

The second tab heading is Program, which uses the Cmd Line entry to specify the filename of the game's .EXE. You can change the working directory to set the DOS "current directory" for the game, and you can also add an entry to the Batch File line if there's a special batch file you'd like to run before starting the game.

You can create a special keyboard combination to start the game by clicking on the box next to "Shortcut Key" and pressing the key you'd like to use. Windows 95 adds the Ctrl+Alt combination to this key, so if you used "D for Doom," you'd press Ctrl+Alt+D at the same time to start the game. This only works if the .PIF settings are moved to one of the subfolders of Windows/Start Menu. We'll show you how in the "DOS Shortcuts" sidebar on page 66.

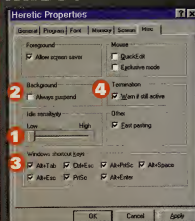


By clicking on the box next to "Run" you can choose whether to start the game normally, as a minimized Taskbar button, or maximized, which has no effect for DOS games. Finally, you can click the box for "Close on Exit." This is definitely recommended; otherwise, the last images displayed by the DOS game remains on the screen in a window, even though the game is over. This can be useful sometimes — to read a registration reminder, for example.

We'll come back to the Advanced button shortly, so keep its position in mind. It's very important.

The Programs page is at the heart of setting properties for a game. After all, this is how Windows knows where to look to start the program.

Miscellaneous



The Misc page is a useful grab-bag of customization settings. The most important one is the slider for Idle Sensitivity.

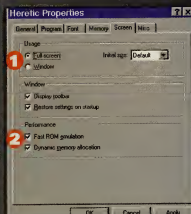
The last property page, "Misc," contains a feature that can be essential for good performance when running DOS games. Look for the slider marked "Idle Sensitivity." Since Windows continues to run while the DOS game plays, it likes to take advantage of idle moments when you're not typing to steal the CPU from the DOS application and let Windows run. But DOS games need to run smoothly, whether or not you're typing, so you can set the idle sensitivity to Low. This may be the opposite of what you might guess, but it gives the DOS program higher priority. This will noticeably slow Windows down, but while you're playing a DOS game, you won't care how slowly Windows is running in the background.

The box marked "Background" lets you decide if you want the game to keep running, even if you've minimized it to the Taskbar, or used Alt+Tab to

switch back into Windows. Turning off "always suspend" allows your game to run in the background, which usually makes it run more smoothly.

If your game uses any of the special Windows keystrokes listed at the bottom of this panel, turn off the checkbox next to it. Beware that if you turn off Alt+Enter and Alt+Space (the keyboard shortcut to let you access Properties), you won't be able to switch away from the DOS game and return to Windows. The Termination Warn checkbox. If still active, it what prevents you from ending the DOS game by clicking the close box (the "X" button) when the game is in a window. That's because Windows has no way to tell the DOS game that it's being shut down, so you won't be reminded to save your game, and it doesn't have a chance to close any open files. But some games do tolerate being shut down this way, so you can try turning off the checkbox.

Screen



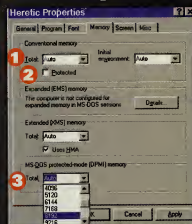
Most of these settings can be left as-is. DOS games will normally run full screen automatically.

On the Screen property page, you can choose whether the game starts up in full-screen DOS graphics mode, or in a little window. Many DOS games can't run in a window, and those that do run too slow to be practical, so you'll probably use Full Screen. Note that this reflects the current state of the game's display, so if you're editing the property sheet from the game's MS-DOS toolbar, it will be set to Window.

Under the Performance section of the Screen page, you'll almost

always leave the options for "Fast ROM emulation" and "Dynamic memory allocation" turned on checked. The first option allows Windows to simulate the ROM BIOS of your computer, which is usually much faster, and the second option permits Windows to reclaim memory when your game switches from graphics mode to text mode. Few DOS games do this, but if you have a game that uses many different graphics modes, you might turn off this box to speed things up slightly.

Memory



If the default Auto settings don't work, try reducing the size of each setting to 8192 K or less.

The Memory tab can be another pretty important one. It contains settings for Conventional Memory, Expanded (EMM) Memory, Extended (XMS) Memory, and DPMI Memory. Normally,

these are all set to Auto; this actually works most of the time.

If you know your DOS app uses very little conventional memory, it will start more quickly if you reduce the amount in the Conventional (Total memory box). You can also click the box for "protected" if you want to erect a wall around the DOS game to prevent it from accessing memory that's shared with Windows. Since this slows the game down, and is usually unnecessary, you'll want to leave it unchecked.

Check your DOS game to see how much it extended and expanded memory it needs. Windows will normally give a game all the memory of these types that it wants, which can make starting the game slow if Windows has to swap all of its own memory out to disk. Some games falsely claim "infinite" requirements for DPMI memory, so you may want to limit this setting to the amount of RAM actually present in your machine, or 8192 K, whichever is less.

Font



This one's not that important. It determines the way your DOS session will be displayed, and can be left just as it is.

Advanced Tweaking

The property pages techniques let you make the most of running games inside Windows 95, but sometimes it just isn't enough. For the very best results, run the DOS game using the environment it was designed for: DOS without Windows. One simple way to do this is to click the Start button in Windows 95 and choose Shut Down, then choose "Restart the computer in MS-DOS mode." Effectively, this exits Windows back to the DOS that was used to boot your computer.

Shut Down Windows



Are you sure you want to:

- Shut down the computer?
- Restart the computer?
- Restart the computer in MS-DOS mode?

Yes

No

Help

One easy way to get back to a pure DOS environment is to select Shut Down from the Start button, then restart the computer in MS-DOS mode.

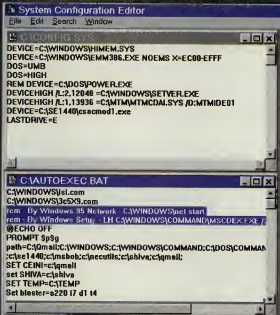
However, because you've already booted your computer to run Windows 95, you may find that the traditional DOS ISBs and drivers, such as mouse and CD-ROM drivers, aren't there to support your DOS game. That's because Windows 95 doesn't need them. Even when running in a "DOS box," Windows automatically supports the

mouse, CD-ROM, and other peripherals, freeing up a big chunk of conventional memory. That's another reason DOS games run so well within Windows 95.

Yet when you're running with pure MS-DOS, you still need to configure your machine just like you did before you installed Windows 95. The drivers and utilities you need can only be started

from CONFIG.SYS or AUTOEXEC.BAT, but you don't want to put them in your normal CONFIG/AUTOEXEC files, since this isn't optimal for Windows. You need a method to boot your computer in a way that's ideal for gaming.

There are three ways to do this. First, you can create a boot disk. From DOS, use FORMAT A:/S to create a "bootable" DOS floppy, then copy to it the CONFIG.SYS and AUTOEXEC.BAT files you need for the game. Some games can automatically create a boot disk for you. Or you can use the "original" versions of these files that Windows 95 saved when you upgraded, as CONFIG.DOS and AUTOEXEC.DOS.



Here's your typical laundry list of DDS AUTOEXEC/CONFIG drivers and settings. Under Windows 95, many have been replaced by 32-bit Virtual Device Drivers.

DOS Shortcuts

Although there's no PIF Editor anymore, the properties you set for a DOS program are still stored in a PIF file, which is treated as a Shortcut on the Windows 95 desktop or in a folder. Normally, this PIF file will reside in the same directory as the game, but you can also drag and drop the PIF file which uses an MS-DOS icon, or drag and drop the game icon itself to the desktop to create a Shortcut link. You can also create a Shortcut by right-clicking in a folder or on the desktop and choosing New Shortcut, and filling in the path to the game. This method also lets you pick a custom icon for the game.



You can create shortcuts to your favorite DOS games by choosing New Shortcut from the game's folder or directory.

You can right-click on a DOS Shortcut and choose Copy, then right-click in a folder or on the desktop and choose Paste to make a copy of the Shortcut. If you open your Programs folder (Windows/Start Menu/Programs), you can even drag and drop the Shortcut into it to have it appear on the Programs menu of the Start button. Or drag the Shortcut icon to the Start button itself and it will appear at the top of your Start Menu. Another way to customize your Start Menu is to choose Start | Settings | Taskbar, then click the tab heading for Start Menu Programs.

Alternate DOS

If you installed Windows 95 separately from Windows 3.1 (i.e., you didn't upgrade on top of your existing Windows 3.1), you can use the dual boot feature. Turn on your computer and as soon as you see the message "Starting Windows 95," quickly press the F4 key. This shifts your computer to "Starting your previous version of MS-DOS" and your computer will run just like it did before you installed Windows 95. Assuming your old CONFIG/AUTOEXEC files were already set up for good game compatibility, you can just run your DOS games like you used to.

But the most powerful feature is MS-DOS Mode: a way to launch a separate DOS environment with its own private copy of CONFIG.SYS and AUTOEXEC.BAT. When a DOS game is set to MS-DOS mode, the computer reboots which wipes memory clean, unloading Windows, then starts DOS 7 the companion to Windows 95, and uses the custom CONFIG/AUTOEXEC files to complete the startup. It then runs the DOS game, and when the DOS game exits, the computer reboots again and automatically restarts Windows.

To get ready for MS-DOS mode, access the Properties for the DOS program and click on the Programs tab heading, then click the Advanced... button. You can now turn on the checkbox for MS-DOS mode.

Before we proceed, notice the checkbox for "Prevent MS-DOS based programs from detecting Windows." This tricks games that refuse to run with Windows into believing that Windows is gone. This is useful, since many of these games that refused to work if Windows 3.1 was running actually perform well with Windows 95 on a fast computer.

Windows 95 already knows that certain DOS games require MS-DOS mode to run properly, and will recom-

mend it when you try to run them in a DOS box. If this nagging is annoying, turn off the checkbox for "Suggest MS-DOS mode as necessary."

Fill 'Er Up

Assuming you do want to set up a game to run only in MS-DOS mode, you'll check the box for MS-DOS mode, then fill in the text boxes for CONFIG.SYS and AUTOEXEC.BAT to create a custom configuration.

When you first choose this option, Windows 95 fills in the CONFIG/AUTOEXEC boxes with a suggested configuration that's a good starting point. Windows 95 can also help you flesh out this custom configuration if you press the Configuration button. This pops up a checklist of common DOS drivers that you might need to run the game, such as Disk Cache, SMARTDRV or Expanded memory, EMM386. Use the

Select MS-DOS Configuration Options

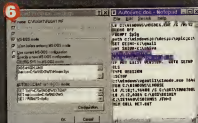


Creating CONFIG.SYS and AUTOEXEC.BAT should always have been this easy. Of course, you'll have to customize further for most games.

Direct Disk Access command to add the LOCK command to AUTOEXEC.BAT, if your game accesses the sectors on your hard drive directly. I'd recommend against this one, since it only makes matters easier for computer viruses should you ever contract one. Even though you can put together a simple custom configuration this way, you'll still have to customize it for most games. It's often easier just to borrow your old CONFIG/

AUTOEXEC. First, open them with Notepad, cut the lines you want to use, and then right-click in the blanks. A paste option will now show up, making the job much easier.

When you run the DOS game this way, in MS-DOS mode, it reboots the computer and starts again in pure DOS to run the game. If the game fails to run for any reason, the computer automatically reboots again, runs Windows. This can be frustrating if you made a simple typo or want to run more than one DOS game. The solution is to set up MS-DOS mode for a DOS session by creating a Shortcut to COMMAND.COM and customizing it for MS-DOS mode. This can be a separate Shortcut than the one you normally use to open a DOS session from Windows. See the "DOS Shortcuts" sidebar on page 66.



By using the Notepad, you can cut and paste commands from your old Config/Autoexec to a custom Windows 95 DOS session.

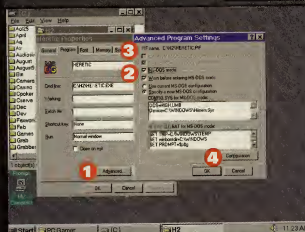
Go For It!

If you get stuck, remember that you can click the ? button in the top-right corner of any property sheet to get the "Help pointer,"

which — in a pinch — can serve as an online tutorial for any of the actions you want to perform. By clicking on the "What's this?" tabs you'll be able to gain more information about each screen's functions. You can also just right-click on any part of the screen to get the same result, in the form of a pop-up hint.

If you follow all these techniques, you'll soon have full control over all your DOS games, and you'll be making the most of your investment in your "legacy" software. As long as there are great DOS games, these techniques will be good to know, but we nevertheless eagerly look forward to the next breed of Windows 95 games that are bigger, faster, and cooler than anything run from a C> prompt. In the meantime, play on!

Charles Brannon is the co-author of *The Windows 95 Book*, ISBN 1-56604-154-6 published by Ventana Press.



From the Advanced configuration screen, you'll have plentiful options to set up your game to run under Windows 95 or in a MS-DOS mode.

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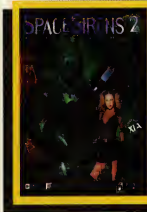
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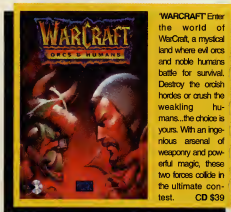
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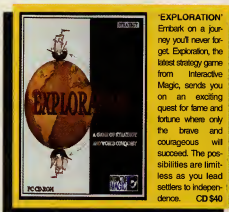
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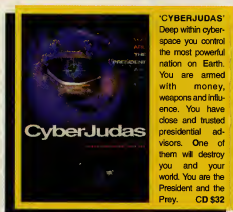
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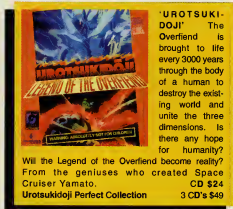
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915 PCGR 4



THE JOYS OF SHARING

Producing your own shareware game can be a rich, satisfying experience — unless you expect to get wealthy overnight...

by Steve Poole

For a long time, most gamers didn't take shareware games very seriously. Sure, there were some veteran players who realized that there were a lot of very good games available as shareware. But if you asked the average user about a shareware game they'd been playing, you'd usually hear "it's a nice little shareware game" — implying that shareware games could never be as handsome or as complex as retail software games.

But that mindset began to change with the release of what is arguably the most influential shareware game ever produced: id Software's *Wolfenstein 3D*. Whether they downloaded it from the Internet or a commercial online service or got a copy from a friend, millions of people were exposed to this ground-

breaking game — and hundreds of thousands liked what they saw enough that they were eager to fork over cash for a complete version.

Wolfenstein 3D was so successful that it wound up producing a separate retail version, then used the money from both versions to bankroll their next game — *Doom*. The numbers racked up by *Doom* made the tidy sums id had earned from *Wolfenstein 3D* look like chump change, and now several major software houses have adopted the "try before you buy" approach of shareware. The number of playable demos has skyrocketed, and at least one company — Interplay — plans on releasing shareware versions of its games whenever possible. And it's working for them: Just look at *Descent*.

DON'T QUIT YOUR DAY GIG

Probably all us computer gamers have had, at one time or another, fleeting dreams of designing a computer game that thousands of people would play — and now it's more feasible than ever. Thanks to the incredible explosion of online traffic, a shareware release can be seen by more people than was dreamed possible just a few years ago. And the arrival of relatively simple game-design programs like *Maxis' Kick 'n' Play* and the *Game Creation System* from *Pie in the Sky Software* means that even those of us who don't know *Virtual Basic* from *Pascal* can slap together a game.

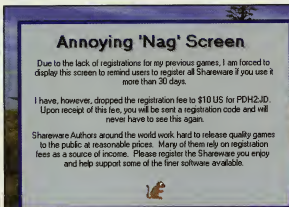
Before you get busy working on your shareware classic, though, you should know a few things. First, the chances of your game becoming a hit or even a cult favorite are small, and the odds of turning a profit even worse. Some people view shareware as free-ware, and will make a pirate copy of a registered version for a friend without thinking twice. And if you release a complete version of your game as shareware, chances are you'll never see any money.

So what's an aspiring game-maker to do? I spoke with several veteran shareware developers to see what advice they had for newcomers, and came up with a few basic guidelines.

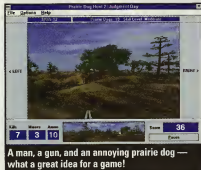
FIVE RULES TO SHARE BY

1. Keep it simple.
Dan Taylor had been with *id Software* for a little over a year when he and Jonathan Clark founded *Crack dot Com* (see sidebar on page 71) in order to produce shareware and, if all went well, retail games. Taylor was a software engineer on *Doom*, so you might think *Abuse*, *Crack dot Com's* first game, would be a first-person action title — but that thought never really ever crossed Taylor's mind.

"After Jonathan and I formed *Crack dot Com*, we brought Murray McMillan and Duong Nguyen on board to do artwork and level design. Since this was their first game, we decided to



Even Ian Firth, the man responsible for this "Nag Screen" at the start of *Prairie Dog Hunt 2*, *Judgment Day*, admits that these types of admonitions — though certainly admirable for the attention they bring to the plight of shareware developers — do little to increase the number of people who register games.



A man, a gun, and an annoying prairie dog — what a great idea for a game!

go with something they were familiar with. They both knew how to design scrolling shooters, so that's what we settled on."

Programming a side-scrolling shooter is pretty simple — especially when compared to all of the complex coding involved in developing a graphic adventure, flight sim, or even a first-person shoot-'em-up. That's one of the reasons there are so many space shooters available as shareware on the Internet or on shareware bundles available at your local software store.

But just because a game is simple doesn't mean it can't look good and play great, or even become a real hit. Take the now-famous *Prairie Dog Hunt 2*, from Ian Firth's *Diversions Software*. (Other titles by *Diversions* include *Prairie Dog Hunt*, *Prairie Dog Hunt 2*, *Judgment*

Day, *Tailgunner*, *Fortress*, *Wak-a-Rat*, *Trap Shooting*, *Win-Fish*.) Games don't get much more simplistic than this twisted shooting gallery. When prairie dogs pop out of their burrows, you blast them with a gun. Probably the most sophisticated feature of the game is that you can choose from four weapons to frag the little critters. But *PDH2*

struck a chord among gamers, and while Firth didn't exactly get rich from the distribution of *Prairie Dog Hunt 2*, its success did allow him to make the move into producing retail games.

Some of the best shareware games, in fact, are variations of old arcade classics like *Defender*, *Space Invaders*, and *Galaga* that gamers fell in love with years ago. *Mutant Space Bats of Doom*, *Xatax*, *Defendroid*, *Raptor*, and other shareware games may not be the sort of titles you want to spend an entire evening with, but they do offer some good, mindless fun. And since they take up so little hard-drive space, chances are you'll keep 'em around. "Absolutely drop any idea of cinematics," says Dan Taylor, "and use the time to create a good, fun game."

2. Create strong incentives for registration.

Because of the nature of shareware, a lot of downloads is little or no guarantee of a lot of registration fees. For starters, there will always be some people who just don't like the type of game you produced, and that's the whole point of shareware — you don't buy it unless you like it. But for everyone who downloads a game and then deletes it from their hard drive after deciding it wasn't what they were looking for, there are probably ten others who play it to death — and who never even dream of sending in the registration fee. Firth estimates the registration rate for shareware to be "less than .003 percent."

Eric Dybsand has been programming computer games since 1987. He founded *Glacier Edge Technology* in 1990 after a company who'd contracted him to design a game called *Sarge* went out of business; he's been developing shareware — mainly wargames like *Battles on Distant Planets*, *Battles in a Distant Desert*, and *World War II: Normandy* — ever since. "The most important thing you can do as a shareware developer is to build in incentives for users to register the game," he says.

"You need to include a good reason to register the game," echoes Firth, who points out that "just putting in a few nag

Bargain-Basement Gaming

Games like *Invasion of the Mutant Space Bats of Doom* (left) and *Xatax* may not push the technological envelope, but they're better than anything 99.9% of us could ever produce. And the asking price is so small that they're worth it even if you only play them every now and again.



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Product Information Number 126





Glacier Edge Technology's *Battles in a Distant Desert* is one of the few shareware wargames around. It's a well-crafted product, so if you're into this sort of game look for it on CompuServe, America Online, and at various FTP sites on the Internet. Tell 'em *PC Gamer* sent ya.

screens to remind people they should register doesn't work. You need to offer them at least 100% more game when they register."

The whole problem of ensuring registration may be a moot point, though. In the past, many shareware developers allowed users to download an entire game, then hoped that at least some of them would be honest enough to pay the registration fee if they continued to use it. But most shareware games follow the Wolfenstein model: You get X amount of the game with no strings attached, and are encouraged to give that version away or even post it online for anyone to download. The incentive in this formula is pretty obvious — the only way you can get more of what you like is to pay for it.

3 Upload, upload, upload!

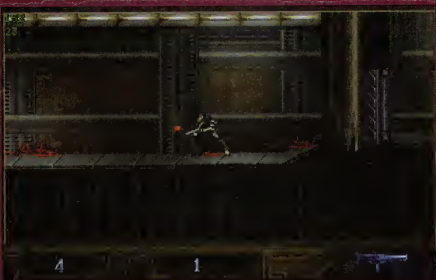
Online activity has skyrocketed in recent months, thanks largely to the media hype surrounding the Information Superhighway and the fact that both America Online and CompuServe now offer full Internet access. But it also means there are literally hundreds of places you can post your shareware game for downloading. Which ones are best?

Dan Puraty, creator of *Double Match*, *Spin 'n' Win*, and *Triple Yahoo*, says it's a tough call, "especially with all the shareware collections out on CD-ROM. Many smaller bulletin boards can



One of the best places to post your shareware game is on the Internet. This World Wide Web site at California State University at San Marcos is basically an FTP site designed to be accessed with a Web Browser.

Same As It Ever Was — Only Different



Abuse, Crack dot Com's debut title, is a side-scrolling shooter. It looks good, it plays great — and it even comes with a utility to create your own shareware games.

As I prowled the Internet late one night looking at various shareware products to cover in this story, I found an informative posting in the comp.sys.ibm.pc.games.action newsgroup for an upcoming shareware game called *Abuse* from Crack dot Com. Seeing an announcement for a new game didn't come as a surprise, but as I read on I realized this wasn't going to be your garden-variety shooter. So I tracked down Dan Taylor, id Software employee and co-founder of Crack dot Com, to get the full story on the game, and to find out what had gone into its creation.

Crack dot Com is really four people: Taylor, co-founder and programmer Jonathan Carter; artist Murray McMillan; and artist/level designer Doung Nguyen. For Taylor, Crack dot Com is a part-time job — he still works full-time at id Software — but Carter, McMillan, and Nguyen have all been working on Crack dot Com's *Abuse* project full-time for several months; they would already have the game ready for release if it weren't for the fact that a decision was made to junk a previous game that was practically finished.

Abuse is a side-scrolling shooter, similar to *Flashback* or *Blackthorne*, but with much fancier graphics thanks to the paint-source lighting used throughout the game. Your victims' wall-crawling reptiles that bear an uncanny resemblance to the creatures in the Alien movies. The setting and storyline for this run-jump-and-shoot extravaganza hasn't been hashed out yet; Taylor says, "Look and feel are more important in an action game than story, so we've focused all our attention so far on making the game play great."

Thanks in part to Taylor's position with id, *Abuse* was released through that company's distribution channels. In other words, you won't be able to turn around without finding a copy you can download from the Internet.

So what's so special about *Abuse*? Well, besides looking and playing great, *Abuse* has several features unique among shareware games. For



Here's what the *Abuse* level editor looks like in use.



Crack dot Com plans to release an SVGA (800 x 600) version of *Abuse*, but you'll need a Pentium to even come close to getting a good frame rate.

starters, the shareware version will ship with a built-in LISP interpreter. In plain speak, it'll let you modify the physics and rules of *Abuse*, or — and this is the exciting part — create an entirely new game that can be ported to any platform. Noting the popularity of homemade *Doom* levels, Taylor says that "with *Doom*, you had to buy the registered version to get extras like level-editing and creation; you get that and more for free in *Abuse*."



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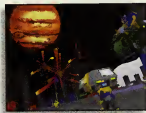
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Product Information Number 81

Changing of the Guard

his month, it was a little hard to come up with the usual batch of cute and clever witticisms for this intro page, because the PC Gamer staff has been experiencing one of those happy-sad, yin-yang, melancholy sort of things. Our old buddy and editor-in-chief, Matt Firme, is giving up the day-to-day hassles of editing a magazine to take on some brand new hassles as PC Gamer's publisher. We're all very happy for Matt and wish him well. He's been a big part of our success, and one of the major reasons PCG has grown from its origins as a livestock journal, way back in the early '30s, to become the World's Best-Selling PC and CD-ROM Games Magazine it is today.

While we're sure our new editor — "Dapper" Dan Bennett — will be a capable leader, we're going to miss the memorable, although at times exasperating, Matt-isms that have characterized our day-to-day routine. Here are a few of 'em we're really going to miss.

No-pants day. Matt started this back around 1952, when livestock interests fell and PC Gamer was positioning itself as a leatherworking magazine. He encouraged everyone to adopt his au naturel style of dress for one day a week. Needless to say, few of us were

willng to partake in this particular activity. He still wants us to, though.

Monkey wrestling. During a particularly hectic schedule, Matt began wrestling monkeys. He says it brings him closer to nature, and he heightens the experience by sharing his favorite malt liquor (King Cobra) with the staff beforehand. It's a joy and a pleasure we fear we may never see again.

William Shatner and Colonel Klink impersonations. Having been a drama student for many years, Matt was able to treat us to entire made-up episodes of "Star Trek" featuring everybody's favorite Stalag commandant, Colonel Klink. You haven't lived until you hear Klink threatening Kirk.

Monthly salute to trucking. When it comes down to crunch time, Matt pops a few Vivarin, slugs down a couple pots of java, then fires up the old Red Sovine and Stompin' Tom Connors tapes. It's when we watch Matt "put the pedal to the metal" to get the issue out the door.

There's lots more we could say about Matt, but with his new mantle of power, we're a little leery of going too far. And he's a lot grumpier these days, because he has numbers in his head. We'll just have to leave you with these few fond memories.

Hardware Requirements

With each PC Gamer review, you'll find two very important pieces of information: the game's minimum hardware requirements and the hardware configurations we recommend as the least you'll need to really enjoy the game. While a game will run on the minimum system the manufacturer specifies, it might not run all that well. Because of this, we test each game on several systems so we can bring you a more realistic assessment of what you'll really need.

THE PC GAMER RATINGS SYSTEM

100%-90% CLASSIC

Not many games can earn a rating over 90%, and even fewer can approach the magic 100. Anything that we rate over 90% is an instant classic — a game that's truly significant in both content and design, and one that we'd recommend without reservation to anyone interested in PC gaming.

89%-80% EXCELLENT

These are excellent games. Anything that scores in this range is well worth your attention, though it may not make any significant advances over its rivals. Also, some genuine benchmark games of decidedly specialist taste will fall into this area — it may be the best 7th Cavalry simulation on the market, but not all of us want to relive Little Bighorn.

79%-70% VERY GOOD

Good games, which we'd recommend to fans of the particular genre — although there are proba-

bly better games out there.

69%-60% GOOD

A reasonable, above-average game. It may be worth buying, but probably has a few significant flaws.

59%-50% FAIR

Very ordinary games. Not completely worthless, but not a very good way to spend your gaming dollar, either.

49%-40% BELOW AVERAGE

Poor quality. Only a few, slightly redeeming features keep them from falling into the abyss of the next category.

39%-0% DON'T BOTHER

Just terrible games — and the lower you go, the worse they get. Avoid these titles like the Black Plague — and don't say we didn't warn you!

PC Gamer Editors' Choice Awards

Each and every month, we honor the best games we see — those earning 88% or above — with our coveted Editors' Choice award. It's not easy to earn the Editors' Choice, and there are a lot of excellent games that fall just short of the honor. So when you see the PC Gamer Editors' Choice logo on a game at your local software shop, you can bet it's among the best of the best.



Mechwarrior 2

PC GAMER
EDITORS'
CHOICE

Category: Simulation

Developer: Activision

Publisher: Activision, 11601 Wilshire Blvd, Suite 1000, Los Angeles, CA 90025 (310) 473-9200

Required

Double-speed CD-ROM drive;
486DX2/50; 8MB RAM; Mouse

We Recommend

Quad-speed CD-ROM; Pentium; 16MB RAM; Supported sound card; Joystick

M.S.R.P. \$59.95

Mechwarrior 2 is finally here, and despite the delays, misfires, and setbacks that have shadowed the project almost since the day it was first announced, the end result shows that good things really do come to those who wait.

Set in the 31st century, the storyline in Mechwarrior 2 has advanced several decades beyond the mercenary tale of the original Mechwarrior, and now presents a much richer, more robust plot that places the

From the opening to the final battle, Mechwarrior 2 is a very impressive game. Yes, it was worth the wait.

player as a rookie BattleMech (or 'Mech) pilot in the stable of one of two powerful clans — the Wolf Clan, and the Jade Falcon Clan.

After being soundly defeated in the Battle of Tukayyid and forced into signing a 15 year cease-fire with the Inner Sphere forces, the Clans have retreated to their homeworlds and are currently engaged in rapidly escalating disputes that threaten to destroy the fabric of Clan society.

Your goal in the game (beyond surviving each mission, of course) is to rise through the ranks gaining honor and prestige until you acquire the rank of Kahn (the title held by the Clan leader). Then you'll challenge the rival Clan's Kahn in a battle to become the il-Kahn, supreme ruler of all Clans.

But before you can achieve that lofty goal, you'll have to claw your way to the top and prove yourself a capable 'Mech pilot. You begin the game by choosing which Clan you wish to join, then proceed to the training grounds, where you'll get some terse instruction on 'Mech-handling from an indignant instructor. Please him, and you're ready to fight; piss him off, and you might just find yourself changing oil in the 'Mech pits.

It's during these training exercises that you get your first glimpse of the cine-



Explosions are big and impressive, especially when you come across something as volatile as this power station.

matic drama the whole Mechwarrior Universe has become. With three resolution modes to choose from — a standard 320x200 mode, 640x480 and an amazing 1024x768 — the view from the cockpit looks far superior and more realistic than the any of the other battling-bot games. The 'Mechs, buildings, and landscapes are all sharply rendered, with modest but effective textures sprinkled about and enhanced by dynamic lighting effects for day, night, dawn, or dusk missions.

And while the low-res mode looks great, when you take the display up a notch to 640x480 you'll begin to see the incredible detail that went into rendering each of the 14 'Mech types, right down to the Clan insignia on the sides of the 'Mechs. Add to all this a very effective score and sound effects from Digital Domain and Soundelux Media Labs (responsible for the sound effects in True Lies), and Mech 2 begins to soar.

But without a strong game engine or good control options, graphics and sound mean nothing, right? Well, the gameplay shows as much attention to detail as the visuals, with missions that



In Mechwarrior 2, you'll be able to rise in rank and honor by facing your well-armed brethren in the trials chamber. But unfortunately, you'll have only your plasma cannons for defense.



Firing its jump jets, this Summoner bounds over your 'Mech to avoid deadly fire.

THE MECH UNIVERSE

It's been over ten years since FASA's boardgame *Battledroids* first introduced the world to the mercenaries, Clans, and hulking BattleMechs of the BattleTech universe.

Since then, BattleTech has grown into a major industry with books, miniatures, and boardgames detailing this elaborate world. With *Mechwarrior 2*, there will no doubt be a whole new generation of computer gamers who'll be introduced to the BattleTech mystique. So if you want to know more about BattleTech, check out these first three PC titles in the series.

BattleTech:

The Crescent Hawks Inception

The first computer translation of BattleTech brought the RPG elements from the boardgame to life with an easy-to-use interface, real-time combat, complex strategy and adventure game elements. If you've never experienced the boardgame and enjoy a good sci-fi yarn, this is the place to start.

BattleTech:

The Crescent Hawks' Revenge

The sequel to *The Crescent Hawks' Inception*, *BattleTech: The Crescent Hawks' Revenge*, furthered the roleplaying and strategy elements of the first game by adding new combat features that allowed you to command up to four Lances (teams), introducing large-scale combat and resource management.

Mechwarrior

One of the forebears of the ever-growing family of first-person shooters, the original *Mechwarrior* blended the resource management and adventure gaming elements of the RPG board game into a fast-shooting simulation that became an instant classic.

are designed to give the player an opportunity to get used to controlling these behemoths, then turns up the heat to the point where you become totally immersed in the struggle of the clans.

As you begin to progress through the campaigns, you'll find that combat is fast and fierce due to the distinctive AI of each of the enemy 'Mechs. Heavily armored 'Mechs such as the Marauder IIC typically move in for the kill and blast away with big guns, while the dreaded Summoners (my personal favorite) use their jump-jet capabilities to launch themselves out of harm's way or to attack from above. This makes the missions so unpredictable you'll often want to enter a mission and find out what kind of opposition you're facing, then reenter with a 'Mech that's better equipped for the job.

The missions are broken into primary, secondary, and tertiary goals similar to those in *TIE Fighter*, with success based on achieving the primary goal.

There's a wide range of mission



One of the most impressive sights in *Mech 2* comes when an enemy 'Mech fires its jump jets to become airborne.



The image enhancement mode shows off the environment with simple wireframe models and allows you to quickly pinpoint mechs with damage.

types as well, from strike, defense and reconnaissance missions all with their own unique feel and character. These missions take place in a wide range of environments, from the cold, dark vacuum of an asteroid to the breaking dawn of desert mesas, and you're always aware of the environment and the role it plays in combat.

The terrain of each of these environments can be a help or a hindrance. Rolling hills provide limited cover, but they also slow you down, while the buildings of the sparse urban environments provide ample protection from marauding 'Mechs. During low-light missions, you'll need to close in quickly to gain visual sightings on enemy 'Mechs, while during midday missions you can sit back and attack from further away.

Mechwarrior 2 supports a number of devices for control, like the CH Products' Flightstick Pro and Thrustmaster FCS, but I found the keyboard for 'Mech movement and the mouse for turret control were all I needed to pilot my 'Mech through mission after mission of 'Mech-busting.

While the campaigns are very satisfying as single-player affairs, it's a little disappointing that they aren't networkable.

Despite expectations, the campaign missions in the initial release won't be multi-player. And even though there is a demo of a few networkable missions included in this version (no doubt to stave off angry mobs of net-loving 'Mechers), they're not part of the main story. So if you were hoping for some juicy net-combat campaigns, you'll have to wait until September for the network add-on disk.

Also missing from the initial release, but due in September/October is yet another expansion disk, which will be a more

detailed version of the Mechlab where players can customize their 'Mech with their own battle insignia and specify camo paint and new weapons.

But really, these disappointments are minor. As it stands, the game is a masterful update of the classic, with nearly all of the features fans of the original were hoping for. And it's just the thing to introduce new gamers to the incredible *Mechwarrior* experience.

—Todd Vaughn

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Cinematic-quality visuals and sounds; silky-smooth control; demanding missions.

93%

LOWS: Demanding system requirements for hi-res modes; full-fledged net gaming will have to wait for an expansion disk.

BOTTOM LINE: If you can only play one battling-robot game this year, make sure it's this one.

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-Ted Chapman, Computer Game Review

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Product Information Number 108

ST:TNG: A Final Unity

Category: Graphic Adventure

Developer: Spectrum HoloByte

Publisher: Spectrum HoloByte, Inc., 2490 Mariner Square Loop, Alameda, CA 94501 (510) 522-3584

Required

Double-speed CD-ROM drive; 486/33; 8MB RAM; 3MB hard-drive space; Super VGA; Mouse

We Recommend

Quad-speed CD-ROM drive; 486/66; 12MB hard-drive space; Supported sound card

M.S.R.P.: \$69.95

Spectrum HoloByte did a lot of things right in developing this game, the company's first use of the coveted Star Trek The Next Generation (ST:TNG) license.

First off, they made sure the game's design group included several members of the TV show's creative team. Naren Shankar, who went from being scientific adviser to regular writer during the show's last few seasons, was brought on as a dialog and scriptwriting consultant; and Denise and Michael Okuda, also TNG

Spectrum's long-awaited foray into the final frontier boldly goes where most graphic adventures have gone before.

alumni, acted as technical consultants. Astute Trek fans will find a few other familiar names in the game's credits, and even Trek novelist Stephen Goldin had a hand in writing *ST:TNG: A Final Unity*.

Spectrum also wisely adopted the episodic formula that helped make Interplay's Classic Trek adventures so satisfying. Like those games, *A Final Unity's* story is divided into several smaller adventures, similar to episodes of a TV show.

And, of course, the game's producers made sure all of the show's stars recorded voice-overs, so the principal characters would sound just the way we expect them to. When Capt. Picard says "Evasive maneuvers," it's Patrick Stewart's unmistakable, cultured tones we hear. Even the *Enterprise's* computer, voiced by Majel Barrett, sounds like an old friend.

If Spectrum had set out to create a new episode of the TV show, they'd have had a pretty good crew to do it with. Problem is, *A Final Unity* isn't a TV show; it's a game, and those are two very different animals.



The tactical station is where all the ship-to-ship combat takes place. Like most of the ship's other systems, it's depicted in authentic-looking Next Generation style.

As a game, *A Final Unity* feels very much like what it is: Spectrum HoloByte's first real attempt at a graphic adventure. And it has a lot of the flaws you'd expect to find in any freshman project.

There's nothing terribly original here. *A Final Unity* is full of clichés drawn from adventure gaming and from Star Trek itself. The Trekkish clichés aren't a huge problem; people who buy this game want to be immersed in the world of their favorite TV show, so some familiar elements (the impossibly huge alien device; the technobabble; the classic test of humanity's worthiness by higher powers) could work in the game's favor.

But there's a lot of territory in *A Final Unity* that will be all too familiar to anyone who has played a lot of graphic adventures: there's a quest for an



It's everybody's favorite starship crew, on the bridge of everybody's favorite starship! Unfortunately, this is one of the very few places you can visit on the beloved *Enterprise*.



"Second star from the left, and straight on 'til morning." Set a course on the estragorion screen, and you're off to seek out new life.



Before it's all over, you'll come face to face with an all-powerful alien entity. You'll have to use some classic Picard-style diplomacy to convince your host of humanity's basic goodness.



On Morassia, the zoo world, you'll have to break a 24th-century smuggling ring. It's not giving anything away to say there's a Ferengi trader at the heart of it.

ancient, legendary artifact; there's a slew of puzzles that seem to exist more to stretch the game out than to move the story along; there's a bunch of traveling back and forth between locations you've already visited; and there's a whole forest of dialog trees you'll have to click through to get all the information you need.

Add to that a handful of little gameplay problems. In some planetside missions, there's a whole lot of walking to do, and Picard and company never hurry; in one instance, it took an onscreen character a couple of minutes to get from point A to point B. You'd never see two straight minutes of Data walking on the TV show — did

Spectrum's designers think it would be any less boring in a computer game?

And don't expect to spend any

time exploring the *Enterprise*. In *A Final Unity*, only two parts of the ship are depicted as actual locations: the bridge and the transporter room. The conference room, such a popular set on the TV show, is reduced to nothing more than a set of doors you click on for a menu of guests you can speak to, and the magnificent engineering level is represented by a single control screen.

Then there are the logic problems. For example, in one scene near the end of the game, Data began to walk toward an alien shuttlecraft. He stopped, identifying a platform in his path as some kind of transporter. A second after that, Worf warned Data of that same transporter. And yet when I told Data to walk to the shuttle again, he didn't go around the transporter; he simply stepped onto it and disappeared. When a character has to do something stupid in order to keep the story moving, you know the writers didn't give enough thought to the plot.

Considering how long gamers have been waiting for *A Final Unity*, you might expect it to be really great — or really terrible. Turns out it's neither. It's a reasonably good graphic adventure, but the only thing special about it is its link to the Star Trek phenomenon. For some gamers, that'll be more than enough, but if you're not a Trek fan, *A Final Unity* may try your patience.

—Dan Bennett



A Final Unity gives us our first glimpse of the Chodak, an ancient alien race long thought to be extinct.

Red Alert!

Warning! Game hints approaching!

Even in the 24th Century, the galaxy is a big, scary place. You'll need to keep your wits about you if you're going to survive. And if your wits aren't enough, these tips might come in handy.

A In those tense ship-to-ship conversations that always come before a battle, try to choose the most Picard-like response available. Follow the good captain's strong but diplomatic demeanor, and you'll be able to end some stand-offs, like the first encounter with Captain Pentara, without firing a shot. In fact, Picard's cautious approach will help get you through all kinds of scrapes.

A On away missions, examine *everything*. And don't just look at it; scan it. Sometimes the information only a tricorder can gather will yield useful clues.

A Listen to your officers; sometimes they'll have suggestions that'll get you moving in the right direction. In fact, if you choose to play at the lowest difficulty level, they'll be all over your back until you do the right thing.

A You'll face some tricky riddles and tough decisions before the game is over. You'll be fine if you remember that in the Trek universe, humans are the humblest, most moral creatures in existence. (That means the most boring response is often the correct one.)

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: The familiar faces, familiar voices — even familiar sound effects — ought to please any Trek fan.

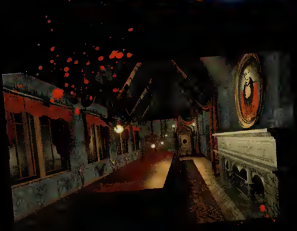
LOWS: The adventure game elements are a little too familiar, and at times this game is slow going.

BOTTOM LINE: If you loved the Next Generation, you'll want *A Final Unity* — just don't expect anything extraordinary.

74%

Unleash Your
Nightmare

A red splatter graphic consisting of a vertical line with several dots and a larger blotch at the top, extending downwards from the right side of the word "Nightmare".



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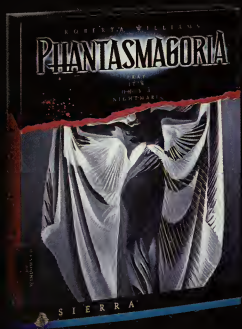
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Product Information Number 132

Hi-Octane

Category: Shooter

Developer: Bullfrog

Publisher: Electronic Arts, 1450 Fashion Island Blvd., San Mateo, CA (415) 571-7171

Required	We Recommend
Double-speed CD-ROM Drive; 486/50MHz; 8MB RAM; Mouse	Pentium 90MHz; SVGA; Joystick of gamepad; Supported sound cards

M.S.R.P.: \$59.95

Hi-Octane is another of those futuristic racers, where you plot a ground-skimming hovercar around various tracks, trying to beat your opponents with a combination of speed and firepower. On the surface of it, then, it's a lot like *Slipstream 5000* — an Editor's Choice winner in our July issue, although I would have rated it considerably lower. I see *Hi-Octane* as the better of the two titles — but I still wouldn't give even *Hi-Octane* the EC.

First, the good points. *Hi-Octane* looks great, with all the nice shading and texturing we've come to expect from Bullfrog. It looks even better in its high-res, 640x480 mode — although you're going to need a top-of-the-line system to get it to run well in high-res. On a P90 with 24MB of RAM, the 640x480 mode was terribly slow unless I turned off the sky, texturing, and other optional graphic extras. And at that point, the 320x200 mode looked better, and ran faster.

Speed is the key to *Hi-Octane*, and its greatest strength. Running in low-res mode (even with all the detail turned on), you really feel the track whiz past you as you kick in those turbo-boosters and hurtle past your competitors. The sensation of flying over the ground, of gravity's pull as you kick your ship through a banked turn, is a delight all its

This is sure to please those of us who've always wanted to wield a gun on the freeway, but couldn't stand the thought of prison.

own. You just know you're going awfully damn fast — which makes it all the more exciting when a rival plants himself next to you, guns blazing, trying to edge you out of the next turn.

And that brings up another strong point: weaponry. Unlike *Slipstream 5000*, where nailing opponents meant only that you'd slowed them up a bit, *Hi-Octane* lets you blow the bejesus out of your foes, sending their collected ammo and fuel reserves spilling out all over the race track. You can re-enter the race, yes — but they'll lose a lot of time and power. So blasting your foes means both a delay in their finish times, and an opportunity to stock up on goodies without having to detour through the fuel, ammo, or shield pit-stops arrayed



■ You can view the action from inside your ship, or from a chase-view behind it. Whenever an enemy is within range, your targeting system will identify and lock on.

ple, and you just swing back to the start screen as though nothing happened.

And although winning the championship on the toughest difficulty setting is no mean feat, it would still be nice if the challenge lasted through more than the six tracks included. I mean, playing this game is a lot of fun; you'll want to do it for days at a time. But with only six tracks available, a championship can be finished in a few hours or less. Between that and the fact that there's no real reward for winning, *Hi-Octane* will leave a lot of gamers feeling as though they've missed something.

As long as you know you're not going to get a big finale, though, you'll be OK. And with the usual Bullfrog emphasis on multi-player gaming and this title's great recreation of speed and destruction, *Hi-Octane* is definitely recommended.

—Matt Firme



■ If you don't have enough turbo power in reserve to escape attack, you'll find your vehicle flipping end-over-end, spilling precious reserves all over the road.

around each track.

There are six ships to choose from, each with very distinctive speed, armament, and handling characteristics. My personal favorite was the Jugga, a big semi-truck looking thing with just the right balance of weapons and speed to mow down just about any vehicle on the field.

There are also six tracks in the game, ranging from NASCAR-style ovals to tricky Grand Prix type urban affairs, with soaring jumps and alternate, off-road paths for the brave.

The problem with *Hi-Octane*, though, is that the game just ends, leaving you feeling rather cheated in the end. Win the championship, for exam-

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Real sense of speed, great graphics, and plenty of gameplay.

82%

LOWS: The game just ends, and much too quickly.

BOTTOM LINE: A very good game — but it could have been a great one.

World Hockey 95

Category: Arcade hockey game

Developer: Merit Studios

Publisher: Merit Studios, 13707 Gamma Road, Dallas, TX 75244
(214) 385-2957

Required

Double-speed CD-ROM drive; 486/25; 4MB RAM; 1MB hard-drive space

We Recommend

486 DX2/66; Supported sound card; Gamepad

M.S.R.P.: \$45.95

Ordinarily, I'll jump at the chance to review anything that has to do with hockey. But in the case of *World Hockey 95* from Merit Studios, it seems I should've looked before I leapt.

Part of the problem with this game is it's just a bit hard to identify with. Instead of giving you the opportunity to play as your favorite NHL team, this import from Merit's European division covers the obscure international hockey scene, where teams represent their respective countries instead of wealthy millionaires, beer companies, or movie studios.

While it's still hockey, the idea of playing a championship game as the Italian Stallions against the Turkish Terrorists just doesn't seem to carry the same weight as, say, a Sunday matchup of the Penguins and the Blackhawks.

And I'm sure there are a few international hockey fans out there who are just itching to play as their

favorite international stars, like Gruber Eubretsen or Szanly Petrovov, and try to win, umm, a trophy or something. But there's a lot more holding this title back than just an identity crisis.

The first really big problem is the nauseating color palette that was used to render the on-ice action. The rink, backgrounds, and players are made up

Even if you make it past the Nintendo-style graphics, the on-ice action of Merit's *World Hockey 95* will only disappoint.

of big splashes of primary colors, and look like they'd be right at home on an 8-bit Nintendo system. While none of the current PC hockey games are known for stellar graphics, *World Hockey 95* could've used a couple more coats of paint, just to be on par with the worst of them.

This wouldn't matter if the game-play were really good, but it isn't. For a game that's supposed to focus on the action aspect of hockey, *World Hockey* does a pretty poor job of delivering. Regardless of what type of controller you choose, moving your players down the ice in a controlled fashion is a hit-and-miss affair, with slow turns, sluggish breakaways, and lazy slapshots characterizing even the strongest teams. And when you've mastered what little control there is, you'll find hanging onto the puck is a chore in itself, as the opposing players seem to be able to steal the puck if they're within shouting distance of your player.

But even though controlling the action is a problem, you still won't have any trouble defeating the game's weak AI. After spending no more than fifteen minutes playing the game, I found the sweet-spot that let me drop five goals in one period. There are a few customizable options that let you set the overall difficulty of the game, but these didn't seem to close up this hole in the defense.

Then there's the view of the rink. Instead of using the standard length-wise, three-quarter view of *NHL* or *Brett Hull Hockey*, *World Hockey* uses an odd, low-angle diagonal side-view. Initially, this seems like it might be a nice alternative to the usual view—until you have a dead puck obstructed by the boards or a player charging down the near side. In these situations, it's nearly impossible to determine the position of the puck, or if you actually have control of the player you want.

But despite these frustrations, there are a few nice things about *World Hockey 95* that I'd like to see incorporated into other hockey games, like the training mode that lets you practice



When your team scores a goal, instead of watching them celebrate by raising their sticks, you'll see the opposition stare blankly at the puck.



Scoring on these guys is just too easy...the Ceneaden goalie puts this one in for you.

defense and penalty shots. Although the opposing team's AI isn't any better here than in the rest of the game, it proved to be a fun little diversion that kept me entertained after I had beaten most of the teams on the roster.

Overall, though, there's little to recommend here. *World Hockey 95* might be enough to satisfy the wee ones, but if you demand any kind of challenge from your hockey games, let this one pass.

—Todd Vaughn



With its out-of-synch audio, the full-motion-video commentary by Bob Conner doesn't add much to the experience of *World Hockey 95*.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Training mode and penalty shots are welcome additions.

LOWES: Retina-burning graphics, sluggish controls, and very weak AI.

BOTTOM LINE: Unless you're a die-hard fan of international hockey, steer clear of this one.

53%

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Product Information Number 127

Space Quest 6

Category: Adventure Game

Developer: Sierra On-Line

Publisher: Sierra On-Line, 3380 146th Place SE, Suite 300, Bellevue, WA 98007 (206) 641-7617

Required

CD-ROM drive; 386; 4MB RAM; SVGA; Mouse

We Recommend

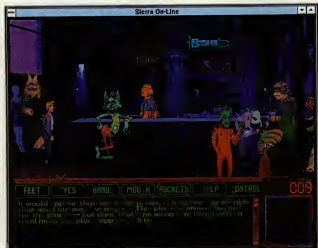
Double-speed CD-ROM; 486; 8MB RAM; Supported sound card

M.S.R.P.: \$59.95

It's hard to keep a good man down. When the going gets tough, the tough get going. Quitters never win, and winners never quit.

Great adages, but how they even remotely apply to Roger Wilco is beyond the combined intelligence of the galaxy. And yet, for all his bumbling, stumbling, and bone-headed moves, here he is again, turning up like the proverbial bad penny, rarin' and ready to save the universe. Just one catch: the universe doesn't need or care to be saved today, at least not by the likes of Roger. So it appears he'll have to set his wobbly sights on something smaller. Much, much smaller.

If you thought the first five Space Quest installments played fast and loose with sci-fi conventions, wait till you get a load of Space Quest 6: The Spinal Frontier.



While the fugitive droid's hiding out in the basement of the night club, you need to figure out a way to convince the bartender that you belong behind the bar. You need some things that are stashed back there.

One part Discovery Channel, ten parts Red Dwarf, the latest episode of Space Quest takes you (literally) into the bowels of sci-fi humor.

If the title itself isn't enough to tell you Roger's creators will be flogging away at all the sacred cows of Hollywood science fiction, consider the game's premise: In an attempt to save luscious crewmate Stellar Santiago's life from the clutches of the evil Sarpei, Roger will let himself be reduced to a microscopic state and injected into Stellar's bloodstream.

There he'll fight his way through a veritable textbook of human anatomy in a struggle to reach Stellar's brain before Sarpei can. That setup should provide the late Isaac Asimov with plenty of rotational impetus.

The adventure begins on Polysorbate LX, a crude little planet located in the backwaters of the galaxy. For most, shore leave would mean a bit of relaxation, a few drinks, maybe a whirlwind romance. That's not for Roger, of course. Right off, he manages to get caught up in a galactic droid hunt, as he agrees to help a stranger bring a renegade endoroid to justice — and all for a measly 50 buckazoids. You see, Roger's a little tapped out, and he needs the cash so that he can purchase a cheat sheet for the galaxy's latest video game hit, *Stooge Fighter*.

Along with the bent humor, all the convoluted Space Quest puzzles we've come to know and hate are here. Case in point: Roger needs to apprehend the endoroid, but every time he gets close, the droid turns him into confetti. After acquiring a tank of liquid nitrogen (we all know what sticky fingers Roger has — probably comes from never washing them), he'll have to find some way to get the bartender in a convenient night club to let him go behind the bar. With what he finds there, plus a trip or two upstairs for a



It's comforting to see a familiar face, even that of a former foe. Be nice to Elmo, and he just might help you win *Stooge Fighter*.



Despite their appearance, these guys would much rather be shopping for home furnishings than dealing with you. Once they're separated, you might try to create a diversion.

few flexible implements, he's got just the right tool for the job of bagging the droid. All he has to do now is track down the droid, quick-freeze it with the nitrogen, then smash it into a million icy slivers and deliver those to the bounty hunter. It's just too many steps for such a tiny piece of the puzzle.

While all the Space Quest games have been littered with allusions to other science fiction, be it literature, film, or television, Space Quest 6: *The Spinal Frontier* is bursting with pointed bars both subtle and gross. Just about everything, from the beloved Mr. Asimov's *Fantastic Voyage* to the TV classic, "The Outer Limits," gets slagged, and the game's creators seem to have gone out

The Space Quest Saga

As Sierra's second-longest-running graphic adventure line, the Space Quest series has taken legions of gamers into its twisted version of the future. The technology has changed drastically since *Space Quest I: The Sarien Encounter*, but a few things have remained constant: the off-kilter humor, the fiendishly bizarre puzzles, and the bumbling underdog hero, Roger Wilco.

The Sarien Encounter introduced us to Roger's arch-enemy, the evil Sludge Vohaul. Roger, a lowly space-janitor destined to remain a lowly space janitor, became a reluctant hero when the forces of evil stole the Star Generator that keeps his home planet of Xenon alive. The original *Sarien Encounter* sported the rudimentary EGA graphics of its day, but was later



Space Quest IV: Roger Wilco and the Time Rippers, marked a huge improvement in graphics and sound for the Space Quest series.

of their way to nail the Star Trek saga. But science fiction isn't the only target of the Space Quest barbs. In one hilarious sequence that will either have Bill Gates howling with laughter or reaching for the phone to call his lawyers, Roger has a run-in with the Information Superhighway, which includes an encounter with the very familiar Windows 3.1 interface.

There's been a major change in Space Quest's appearance since install-

ment five. Gone are the more traditional Sierra-style cartoons of bygone days, replaced with graphics quite similar to the latest King's Quest episode. At first, I thought I had stumbled into one of those horrible little Don Bluth Space Ace clunkers. The game's look is just a little too Disney-esque for my tastes, but at least the graphics don't grate on my nerves the way the narration does. I found myself doing exactly what I did when I played the CD-ROM enhanced version of *Space Quest 4*—turning off the narration as soon as I started the game.

Despite changes in appearance, the interface functions just as it did before, which is to say quickly and efficiently. This is the first Space Quest game that runs under both DOS and Windows, but the results are somewhat mixed. Everything seems to work well enough with the new Windows version, but you'll need to decide right off whether you want to play in DOS or Windows. For some reason, neither format can read games saved under the other.

The bottom line is that *Space Quest 6: The*

given a classy VGA facelift to match the later games in the series.

Space Quest II: Vohaul's Revenge brought Sludge back with a grudge. This time around, Vohaul had hatched a horrifying plan involving countless clones of insurance salesmen. Naturally, he had to be stopped, and Roger was the man to do it.

Space Quest III: The Pirates of Pestulon was programmed with a new graphic adventure system that allowed higher resolution, 3D graphics. It also featured the series' first serious musical score, written by Supertramp's Bob Siebenberg.

Another huge graphic leap came with *Space Quest IV: Roger Wilco and the Time Rippers*, the first of Roger's adventures to be done in 256-color VGA graphics with beautiful hand-drawn backgrounds. This one also had the most convoluted story line, with Roger actually travelling back in time to visit *Space Quest I*.

After saving the universe four

times, Roger finally got command of a starship in *Space Quest V: The Next Mutation*. Of course, it was a garbage scow. You can take the man out of the muck, but you can't take the muck out of the man.

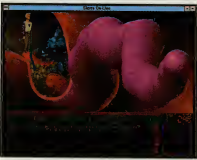
Where will Roger show up next? There's no telling, but it's certain he will. Here's hoping he'll be back in the cutting-edge graphic surroundings that made his fourth and fifth adventures so convincing.



Your mother always told you to clean up your room. Oh well, it just makes finding what you need here a bit more complicated.



He said he'd give his right arm for you, and he did. But you need to see eye to eye with him on another body part before you can receive some hologrammatic training.



Wow, no wonder people have these things removed. Was there anything this woman wouldn't eat? Once again, however, someone else's messy habits mean good luck for Roger.

Spinal Frontier, despite a couple of steps backwards as far as the graphics and voice-overs are concerned, will satisfy the perverted, dark needs of twisted Space Quest fans.

Yep, it takes one to know one.

— Gary Meredith



Since the game is rigged, it doesn't matter which Stooge you pick — you'll lose anyway. Didn't I tell you to be nice to Elmo?

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGH: Plenty of the puzzles and cut-fi jobs you've come to expect from the SQ series.

LOW: Annoying narration; the animation feels too cute for the subject matter.

BOTTOM LINE: It's not the best of the Space Quest series, but it's something fans of the previous games will definitely want to check out.

82%

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POWER KITS

Product Information Number 103

The Orion Conspiracy

Category: Graphic Adventure

Developer: Divide by Zero

Publisher: Domark Software, 1900 S. Norfolk St. San Mateo, CA 94403 (415) 513-8929

Required

CD-ROM drive; 486/25MHz; 4MB RAM; 10MB hard-drive space; SVGA; DOS 5.0 or later

We Recommend

Double-speed CD-ROM drive; 486/50 MHz; 8MB RAM; Smartdrive disk-cache; VLB video card; Mouse; Supported sound card

M.S.R.P.: \$54.99

.....

Would you enjoy watching a middle-aged sleuth strolling through a space station? Then you're going to love this new adventure.

At first glance, it appears that this new title has all the ingredients for a great adventure game: A twisting plot, plenty of unique characters to interact with, and fair but challenging puzzles. I guess it just goes to show that appearances can be deceiving, because almost none of that potential is fulfilled.

This sci-fi adventure game is set in 2160, and casts you in the role of Devlin McCormack, former captain of a research vessel. McCormack retired several years earlier after being injured in an attack by a rival company's starship during the "corporation wars" that began as disputes over territorial rights.

But McCormack's troubles didn't end there. He was scorned by company employees for his inability to work, and his soon his home life crumbled, too. His son Danny left home for an apprenticeship at the Kobayashi Corporation, then his wife committed suicide. The final straw came shortly thereafter: Danny



When Devlin tries to snatch a pie from Chandra's larder, he receives a reprimand — then Chandra walks over and assumes this odd blocking position for the next 30 seconds or so. It's just one example of the sparse and unrealistic character animations in the game.

was killed in a mysterious accident after a routine patrol to explore the event horizon of a black hole.

The game opens after the memorial service at the Kobayashi Research Station Cerberus. As McCormack sits in his quarters, someone slides an anonymous note under the door — and it says that Danny's death was not an accident. Your goal: to find out what — or who — really caused Danny's death, and learn why Kobayashi Corp. is so intent on hushing up the whole affair.

It's an interesting story with a lot of potential for graphic-adventure goodness, but after spending a lot of time with this game I've only got one word to describe it — boring.

Where do things go wrong? Well, the first big drawback is the poor voice acting: Few if any lines are delivered in a truly convincing manner. Often the dialog is so listless and dry that it sounds as though it's being read right from the game's script by people who've probably never done anything like this in their lives — you really have to hear it to appreciate just how lame it is. Even the addition of some fairly strong adult language (expect to hear at least five of the Seven Words you can't say on TV) doesn't help liven things up significantly.

Then there's the way the game handles interaction with the characters. When McCormack meets someone you can talk to, you're given the same list of questions every time: What is your job? What's it like to work here? How well did you know Danny? Did anything



The intro consists of several sequences of impressive 3D-rendered animations like this one. That must be some pretty strong material — maybe transparent aluminum — used in this ship!

unusual happen before Danny's death? A question is usually added to the list that applies specifically to the person you're addressing, but these simply aren't enough to shake the weary feeling of sameness that permeates each conversation.

But the biggest problem with *The Orion Conspiracy* is the incredible amount of walking that Devlin does. I'd guess that more than half of the time you spend playing this game will be taken up by simply watching Devlin make his way from place to place; what's worse, many of the screens (especially the seemingly endless decks where the crew lives) look identical. It can take Devlin nearly five minutes to go check out a location, then five minutes on the way back — and all you can do is sit on your hands and wish he'd pick up the damn pace a little.

It's a shame, because if you stick with it for long enough you'll find a pretty devious mystery that needs to be solved. Too bad only the most patient of gamers will be able to make it to that point in the game.

—Steve Poole



There's a lot stronger language than this in *The Orion Conspiracy*, but it's delivered so unconvincingly that it doesn't add much to the proceedings.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: An intriguing plot, and a fairly good cast of characters.

LOWS: Sparse animation; lots of poorly written dialog, and weak voice acting.

BOTTOM LINE: If you can endure the game's slow pace that is a good mystery to solve.

50%

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Multimedia Celebrity Poker

Category: Poker Sim

Developer: New World Computing

Publisher: New World Computing, Inc.,
P.O. Box 4302, Hollywood,
CA 90078-4302 (818) 889-5650

Required

Double Speed CD-ROM; 486/33; Windows 3.1; 4MB RAM; SVGA; Mouse

We Recommend

486 DX2/66; 8MB RAM; VLB Video Card

M.S.R.P.: \$49.95

One of my favorite pastimes is getting together with good friends for a game of poker. We pull out the tortilla chips and salsa, and if we're feeling particularly stereotypical, even smoke a few nasty cigars. New World Computing has tried to replicate this comradie in *Multimedia Celebrity Poker*. Unfortunately, it just doesn't come close to the real thing.

Jonathan Frakes, best known for his role as Commander Riker in "Star Trek, The Next Generation"; Morgan Fairchild, of "Falcon Crest" and "Dallas" fame; and "Saturday Night Live" regular turned steroid-addled muscle-head, Joe Piscopo; all take time out of their oh-so-busy schedules to enter the world of multimedia stardom.

The idea of playing poker with three stars would seem to be appealing, especially when you consider the legendary gambling prowess of Frakes' character Commander Riker. But, if you're hoping to pit your wits against this renowned poker face, prepare to be disappointed. As a matter of fact, one of the main elements in poker — bluffing — is absent. Betting is limited to 12 chips, making any meaningful bluff very nearly impossible.

The poker part of *Celebrity Poker* is flat, too — no better than any other poker sim around. There are only eight variations of play, from seven card stud to five card draw, and playability seems to have taken a back seat to the live-action video.

The greatest weakness, though, is the video itself. It quickly becomes an obvious series of looping frames — at times, laughably so. And so instead of creating the feeling that you're playing against live celebs, the repetitive video reminds you constantly that you're only



Looks like Jonathan is getting a bit bored. But you never saw Captain Picard's Number One do this before!

watching a movie.

Ultimately, this is just a poker sim with a gimmick. It would be nice to "play" with the stars, but the excitement wears off as quickly as the video starts repeating itself.

—Michael Wolf

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

PLUSES: Nice full-motion video footage; simple and intuitive interface.

MINUSES: Motions and comments by the stars become repetitive very quickly, so there's not much replay value.

BOTTOM LINE: Don't expect to stay up late nights with this one.

58%

Hey, check out the free INT! software on the CD-ROM in this mag!



Virtua Chess

Category: Chess Simulation

Developer: Titus

Publisher: Titus Software Corp., 20432
Corisco St., Chatsworth,
CA 91311 (818) 709-3692

Required

CD-ROM drive;
386SX/16; 2MB
RAM; VGA; mouse

We Recommend

Double speed CD-
ROM; 486/DX33;
4MB RAM; VESA
driver

M.S.R.P.: \$49.95

Don't be fooled by the name. Virtua Chess isn't "virtual chess," and it doesn't require a VR helmet. This is a straight-forward chess program that can challenge players of all skill levels, from the casual player to the more advanced chess aficionado.

The chess engine, the most important facet of any chess game, has placed highly in recent tournaments against both man and machine, and has

been written entirely in assembly language, which allows the engine to process faster than most other chess programs. And in chess, thinking faster is better.

While plenty of other programs have utilized world-class chess engines, many have been burdened with poor graphics and few options. That's not the case with Virtua Chess; the 3D piece sets, modeled using Silicon Graphics, look good, and with the click of a button you can resize, rotate, and tilt the board to virtualize any perspective.

And the interface lets you customize the game screen with multiple display boxes that further enhance the experience, and can help give some insight into advanced playing techniques. Move lists, captured piece lists, and think boxes (which let you see what the program is thinking) are just a few of the many displays that can be added.

Depending on the level of challenge you want, Virtua Chess can be adjusted to suit a wide range of personal skills and at full strength has the capabilities to prove more than a challenge for all but the top percent of professional players.

There are a lot of good things to be said about the game. It's not as smooth as the Chessmaster series, and doesn't include an online tutorial, but it can load and analyze any scoresheets in PGN for-



With so many display boxes to choose from, it doesn't take long to tailor the screen to your liking.

mat, and play over a network. These features aren't new, but the strong gameplay and smooth interface does position Virtua Chess within striking distance of the elite chess sims.

—Joseph Novicki

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: A powerful chess engine, sharp graphics and plenty of extras.

86%

LOWS: New players eager to gain insight into advanced techniques will be disappointed by the lack of a tutorial.

BOTTOM LINE: If you like a challenge, Virtua Chess is a surprisingly strong entry into the computer chess arena.



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Flight Unlimited

PC GAMER
EDITORS'
CHOICE

Category: Flight Simulation

Developer: Looking Glass Technologies

Publisher: Looking Glass Technologies,
One Alewife Center, Suite 450,
Cambridge, MA 02140
(617) 576-3310

Required

Double-speed CD-ROM drive; 486/33; 8MB RAM; SVGA graphics; 25MB hard-drive space

We Recommend

Quad-speed CD-ROM drive; Pentium 90; Flight yoke and rudder pedals; Supported sound card

M.S.R.P.: \$59.95

confess, I've always liked a little action in my flight simulations. Hell, if you can't blow anything up, what's the point of pretending? But I'm starting to change my attitude now that I've found a flight sim that makes just plain flying fun.

If you're a battle-weary veteran of air combat sims, *Flight Unlimited* might be just the sort of R&R you need. Forget the boogies for a bit and buckle in for some pure recreational flying, because this flight sim soars.

Flight Unlimited is the most fun I've ever had in a computerized cockpit. It looks, sounds, and feels for all the world like you're flying over Arizona, Virginia, or Alaska, pulling stunts in high-performance aerobatic aircraft.

The terrain graphics are just superb. Aerial photos, touched up and stretched across a 3-D contour map, give you a beautiful backdrop for your aerobatic antics — and a pretty place to die when you screw up. You'll roar over mountains, through narrow valleys, alongside rivers and highways.

What you hear in *Flight Unlimited* is every bit as good as what you see. The game's developers recorded engine

With picture-perfect graphics and dead-on flight modeling, this is as close to reality as sims get.

sounds for each aircraft, so no two sound the same. The sound effects are utterly convincing, from the growl of a rotary engine to the eerie rush of wind around the silent sailplane. There's some nice audio detail on the ground, too, although somebody needs to do something about that yapping dog.

As outstanding as the terrain graphics are, this aerial playground was designed for stunt flying; it's what happens in the air that really counts. *Flight Unlimited* models not only the aircraft, but also the air flowing around it. It's a dynamic model, with terrain and elevation affecting air currents. In the sailplane, you really get a feel for the fluid wind currents that are at work in the game. Catch one just right, and a thermal — a rising column of warmer air — can give you quite a ride. The sensation of actual flight is nothing short of magnificent.

You have four powered aircraft waiting in the hangar: the Pitts S-2B, the Sukhoi SU-31, the Extra 300S, and the Bellanca Decathlon. All are lightweight planes built for stunt flying. Throw in

the Grob S-103 sailplane for a little seat-of-the-pants gliding, and you're ready to take off.

There are no fancy airports here. For your flying pleasure, you'll choose from five FBO (Fixed Base of Operations) buildings with small runways. These FBOs serve as the interface to the various game options; as you move around the 3D-rendered FBO building, you can pick your plan, check out your log book, travel to another FBO, and



From the options screen, you can set the detail levels and adjust difficulty levels to suit your flying style.



For a unique flying challenge, try taking this sailplane out for engine-less flight.



With the external camera view of *Flight Unlimited*, you get a great view of the photo-realistic graphics and realistic lighting effects. The terrain graphics in this aerial playground are outstanding.

Flyin' and dyin' in *Flight Unlimited*



Flight Unlimited's photorealistic graphics really show their stuff when you take the Sukhoi down on the deck for a closer look...



...just don't maneuver in too close to the ground, or you might subject your plane to those unseen ground effects and end up...

sign up for flight lessons. The first-person approach works pretty well, although some gamers may prefer a more traditional menu screen.

The flight school is a dream come true for any budding pilot. There are about 30 lessons, starting with the basics and moving on through some pretty complex aerobatic maneuvers. After some ground-school lessons, you'll take a plane up to try out your new tricks, and that's where the flight school really takes off. Your flight instructor is beside you every step of the way, talking you through increasingly difficult maneuvers, from a simple turn to an inverted spin. His voice is clear, his tone sure and patient. This sounds and feels so real that you'll find yourself getting nervous as you attempt a maneuver. And the instruction is excellent, with a heads-up display showing you the proper angle of attack and other pointers for each maneuver.

The log book is another excellent feature, adding to the you-are-there realism of the flight school. Here you'll see a record of your flights and the certificates you've received. You also use the log book to view the "tapes" of any flights you've recorded.

After you've earned your wings in flight school, you can test your skills on 18 race courses, where you pilot your plane through hoops in timed competition. Some are easy, while the aerobatic

obstacle courses are incredibly demanding.

Cockpit instrumentation is minimal, but that's consistent with these aerobatic aircraft and with the game itself. In *Flight Unlimited*, it's not where you're going that counts; it's how much fun you'll have getting there. Inside the cockpit,

you can choose from several views, including a virtual cockpit mode that lets you turn your head to get a better view of all that gorgeous terrain. For serious stunt flying, the aerobatic view lets you monitor the gauges and watch a graphical representation of your plane's position.

A joystick works fine for *Flight Unlimited*, but this sim deserves better. A yoke and rudder pedals add the perfect touch to the game's remarkable realism. *Flight* also supports various virtual reality headsets.

Naturally, these high-end graphics come at a price. Even my Pentium 90 struggled to run *Flight Unlimited* at the



...rolling across those hills and valleys, with you and your plane in a heap of twisted metal, broken glass, and charred flesh.

highest resolution settings, but the program gives you enough options for reducing detail that you can get a decent frame rate with the fastest 486 machines. The box lists a 486/33 as the minimum platform, but that must be a joke. This baby really needs a Pentium—the faster, the better.

If you've got the machine to run it, you're gonna love *Flight Unlimited*. You'll find out you don't need machine guns and bombs to have fun in the computer cockpit. Now, if these guys would just start working on a World War II combat sim...

—Lee Buchanan

But can it fly to Chicago?

The obvious question, of course, is how does *Flight Unlimited* compare with Microsoft's *Flight Simulator*? The answer: Like apples and oranges.

Sure, both are real-world flight sims, recreating what you might experience if you had enough money, guts, and free time to get into recreational flying. No bullets, no bombs, no dogfights. But the similarities really end there.

Since comparisons are inevitable, though, let's take a look at how these two fine sims differ.

The venerable *Flight Simulator*, now in version 5.1, is the benchmark for non-combat flight sims. In fact, it's been the only game in town for years. Add on scenery disks have mapped pretty much the

entire world, allowing computer pilots to fly from, say, Peoria to Paris using real instrument navigation.

Despite its name, *Flight Unlimited* is much more limited in its scope. It's a virtual aerobatics school, period. Navigation is not a factor. This baby is strictly all about flying for fun.

The verdict: If you're serious about simulating recreational flying on your computer, you need 'em both. For realistic navigation, instrumentation, and weather—and if you just want to fly to a real-world location you'll recognize—stick with *Flight Simulator*. If you're in the mood for some death-defying stunt flying with photo-realistic graphics, load up *Flight Unlimited*. You can't go wrong either way.

PC GAMER

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Best graphics ever seen in a flight sim. Excellent flight school puts an instructor right beside you.

91%

LOWS: You'll need at least a Pentium 90 before the game really starts to cook.

BOTTOM LINE: With its incredible graphics and great flight school, *Flight Unlimited* soars above the pack of flight simulators.

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7th LEVEL

Product Information Number 82

Powerhouse

Category: Economic sim

Developer: Impressions

Publisher: Impressions; 222 Third Street, Suite 0234, Cambridge, MA 02142 (617) 225-0500

Required

CD-ROM drive;
386SX or faster;
4MB RAM; SVGA;
10MB hard-drive
space; Mouse

We Recommend

Double speed CD-ROM; 486DX; 8MB RAM; Supported sound card

M.S.R.P.: \$69.95

Power controls every aspect of our lives, from the morning cup of coffee to the computer I'm using to write this review. Like it or not, the big power companies have us by the short-and-curries: They literally have the power of life and death. Without power, the very fabric of society would come unraveled: look at any New York City blackout as proof. Power is power.

Sounds like a cool arena for a game, no? Well, David Lester and those business sim fiends over at Impressions sure thought so, and they've come up with a future scenario in which megapower companies vie for domination of an energy starved world. *Powerhouse* gives you the reins of one of these corporations, a small territory to start it, and a populace hungry for electricity.

What can you do with it? Will you invest in environmentally safe forms of power,

Those fiends over at Impressions bring their talents to yet another business sim, and produce a qualified success.

or let your power plants pollute the region? Will you hire researchers to come up with new and better forms of power and improve your plants? Does the new communist government in that little country you're servicing want to convert all your power plants to state ownership? Maybe a little sabotage or industrial espionage will give you a bit of an edge over the competition.

Welcome to the strange world Impressions' economic sims. Impressions — creators of *Air Bucks*, *Detroit*, and other strategic titles — is one company that learns from its mistakes, listens to its users, and always produces a better product next time out, and *Powerhouse* is no exception. Using a handsome Windows interface, Super-VGA graphics, and some multimedia tinsel, they have created their most streamlined, attractive, and playable game yet. It'll take a few passes through the manual to understand the elements of play, but that's only because this is a complex subject and a multifaceted game.

The premise is simple. You and your three opponents start in a single territory and must meet that area's energy needs. At the outset, you hire surveyors to chart the land and determine the most profitable forms of energy for each square of the territory. Is there gas there? Will it support a dam or a windmill? How hard will it be to harness this energy? And what will be the environmental impact? All these questions are answered by each surveyor for a nine-square area. Once the best energy source is determined, you build it, start improving it, and start looking for more sources to exploit. All the while you watch as the territory draws power from the other companies as well as yours, with the company providing the most power and the most profit emerging on top.

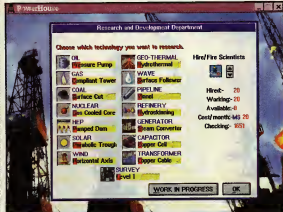


Most of *Powerhouse* is played with this main map and icon bars, as you build power plants and watch the growth of your company.



An accurate survey will save much time and money, since surveyors recommend which form of energy is best for which site.

Powerhouse puts nine forms of power at the disposal of the user: coal, oil, gas, solar, nuclear, wind, wave, tidal, and geothermal [see sidebar]. Some are more profitable than others, some more environmentally sound, some cheaper to maintain or easier to exploit. This tends to fluctuate from site to site and government to government. Some coal is very deep and requires months to reach. Some governments are very intolerant of bad environmental impact, and will cause trouble for forms of energy that pollute or owners who don't keep sites clean. Some forms of energy are good to build early because they're cheap to build, produce a regular yield, and are environmentally safe. With solar, wind, and hydroelectric, you're pretty sure of a continual — if smaller — yield in the early days of your company. When you



Scientists research improvements in each element of play, from creating more reliable nuclear power to better surveys.

The Tools of Power

After determining the most profitable form of power for a square, you can build any of the following units to best exploit that location. Some sites need more than just the basic rig, they need refineries and generators to produce usable energy, thus increasing overhead. The trade-off, of course, is in a greater yield in both power and profit.

Oil Rig



Extracts oil from ground. Requires Refinery and Generator to process and convert into energy. Costs calculated monthly for offshore, every six months for land.

Natural Gas Rig



Extracts natural gas from the ground. Requires Generator to produce electricity. Costs calculated monthly for offshore and every six months for land.

Coal Mine



Extracts coal from the ground. Requires Generator to produce electricity. Costs calculated yearly.

Nuclear Plant



Uses nuclear fission to produce energy, uses fusion if you invest in research. Costs calculated monthly.

Hydroelectric Plant



Traps water in reservoirs and releases it through turbines to produce electricity. Can only be built in rivers. Costs calculated every two months.

Wave & Tide Power



Harnesses the energy produced by the rising and falling of tides and waves. Can only be built on the ocean. Costs calculated yearly.

Wind Farm



Produces electricity with wind-driven turbines. Costs calculated yearly.

Solar Plant



Converts energy from the sun into power. Costs calculated yearly.

Geothermal Plant



Harnesses earth-generated heat. Costs calculated yearly.

Generator



Converts gas, coal, and refined oil into electricity.



Video news clips end and begin each year, but the video quality is only average.

spend five or six months drilling for oil or waiting for that nuke to get online, they'll supply some much-needed capital and keep you afloat.

As with all Impressions titles, countless charts, graphics, pie charts, and monthly reports track progress and failure. Every year or during emergencies there are small, and mostly useless, video clips to determine CEO of the year and other such nonsense. They don't add much to the product, but it was nice of Impressions to try.

Players can buy and trade in stock, borrow money to expand, and, most interesting of all, conduct "unique operations." These range from sabotage, espionage, and slander to bribing government officials, and add a nice twist to the game (a twist that was promised for, but left out of, *Transport Tycoon*).

Obviously these have their risks, but it's fun to at least try to see if you can blow up someone's nuclear power plant. Fluctuating governments also add interesting elements to play, with some being more environmentally minded, and others unstable and dangerous to operate in.

Powerhouse has enough elements to keep it interesting, but only to fans of economic simulators. And even for them, play may begin to feel slightly redundant after the first few territories: survey, build, improve, move on. Impressions would have done better to bring the social aspect into play more by including the cities which are sucking up all this power. What if your company caused a blackout which led to unrest in your city and maybe even rioting? Still, there's enough challenge to keep people coming back, and a respectable enough computer opponent to keep things interesting. Another winner from Impressions.

—T. Liam McDonald

PC GAMER

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Engaging mix of economics, strategy, and dirty deeds. Good interface and detailed SVGA graphics.

LOWS: Long-term play seems redundant. Modest video quality adds little to game.

BOTTOM LINE: A good game for business sims fans and *SimCity* aficionados, but others might find it a bit of a yawn.

80%

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SimTown

Category: Simulation for kids

Developer: Maxis

Publisher: Maxis, 2 Theatre Square,
Orinda, CA 94563
(510) 254-9700

Required

CD-ROM drive;
386/25MHz; 8MB
RAM; 1MB hard-
disk space; Super
VGA; Mouse;
Windows 3.1

We Recommend

Double-speed CD-
ROM drive; 486;
20MB hard-disk
space

M.S.R.P.: \$39.95

Back in the late '80s, *SimCity* was a huge hit on the PC, and it quickly earned classic status. The challenge of managing a growing city and keeping the citizens happy made for an intriguing, addictive game. Now Maxis has created a *SimCity* for kids, bringing the same tried-and-true formula to a smaller, more accessible scale.

Aimed at kids aged 8-12, *SimTown* has plenty to hook you and keep you playing. Just like in *SimCity*, you build roads, houses, buildings, etc., with a simple point-and-click interface that's a snap to learn.

Starting with an empty tract of land, you'll build a town from the ground up using items from a variety of categories, including Terrain (grass, trees, roads, etc.); Homes (Tudor, apartment, ranch, etc.); Community Buildings (school, fire station, post office, etc.); Businesses (pizza parlor, grocery, radio/TV station, etc.); and Fun Places.

It's that last category that'll really excite kids: you can build arcades, movie theaters, zoos, and other neat stuff for all those little sim citizens to enjoy. There are also some unusual homes to choose from, including a haunted house, a castle, and a futuristic home that looks like a spaceship. Another nifty element is the ability to create and name your own citizens. These little touches give kids a great way to express their creativity and learn about the world they live in.

But even with all these choices, you may soon feel like you're getting stuck in a rut, adding more of the same houses and businesses and managing resources like water, trees, and crops. Once your town has grown to a certain size, there's nothing new to do; you start to feel like you're not accomplishing anything.

At this point, kids might be tempted

Kids itching to build their dream town get the chance with *SimTown*, a pint-sized version of the classic *SimCity*.

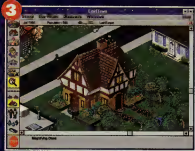
No Place Like Home



1 Here's my town in all its glory. This view gives you an overall look at your creation.



2 You'll use this view the most because it's easy to build roads, houses, and businesses at this scale.



3 Here's my house! After creating my character in the Designer Character section, I built this house, and my computerized counterpart moved in. This view is not really functional, but it does let you see your sim citizens up close.



4 Double-clicking on houses takes you inside. Looks like nobody's home except Indigo, my lovable mutt. See the computer on my kitchen table? Most of the sims have similar machines: my town must be pretty advanced, huh?

to give up, but there are a few extras that help keep the game challenging and fun. You can turn on the Eco-Villain mode, which triggers ecological baddies like Water Hogs, Litter Bugs, etc., to wreak havoc on your town and keep you busy. You can even have the game trigger natural disasters like droughts, earthquakes, and fires.

SimTown also comes with four Fixer-Upper Towns — ready-made villages with specific problems you'll have to solve. It's when you manage one of these towns that you start to realize how everything works together. In BadAir-Town, for instance, there are too many roads. What does that have to do with the bad air? Well, more roads means more cars, which means the town is full of smog, which means your sims are getting sick. If you don't get the town back into shape quickly, you could be kicked out by an angry mob!

All of this gets the little wheels in your head turning: What would happen

if you built a town with just bike paths and walkways instead of roads? What about separating all the homes from all the businesses with a big, central park? It's these kinds of challenges that will keep kids coming back for more of *SimTown*, just like their parents keep going back to their old favorite, *SimCity*.

— Lisa M. Howie

PC GAMER

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: There's a lot to explore and plenty of variety.

LOWS: It can get boring if you don't take advantage of all the extra touches the program has to offer.

BOTTOM LINE: You learn valuable management lessons and have fun at the same time.

76%

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VIC TOKAI INC.

22904 Lockness Ave. Torrance, CA 90501

PC CD-ROM

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Product Information Number 159

Balor of the Evil Eye

Category: Strategy game

Developer: Koei Corp.

Publisher: Koei Corp., 1350 Old Bayshore Hwy., Suite 540, Burlingame, CA 94010 (415) 348-0500

Required

CD-ROM; 386; Mouse; MS-DOS 5.0

We Recommend

Double-speed CD-ROM; 486; Supported sound card

M.S.R.P.: \$59.95

Over the years, Koei has put out some truly impressive warfare simulations set in different periods throughout history. Their newest title, *Celtic Tales: Balor of the Evil Eye* follows the company's traditions of exhaustive historical research, total control over gameplay, and deep economic and wargaming aspects. In fact, Balor is so complex that most gamers, even strategy veterans, may find it intimidating from the moment they open the box. This isn't a game for everyone: only those with great patience and really big brains will be able to glean the truly entertaining game that is hidden within this title.

For a game filled with such complexity, the basic idea is fairly simple. As the leader of one of eighteen tribes in the

Koei lets loose with a complex strategy game that's likely to confuse as many players as it entertains. But this time, that's not so bad...

land of Eire, you must acquire wealth, land, and influence to become High Ruler of the kingdom. Once you have the people of Eire behind you, you must attempt to take on the mighty army of Balor and overthrow his evil reign.

Aiding you in your quest is the somewhat flighty goddess Danu, several trusted advisors (slightly more reliable in a crunch, but without the same flair for fashion), and if you're lucky, some of the heroes who walk the land.

Once you've got a basic team together, you'll begin the laborious process of taking over Eire. More than just gathering an army and marching on the nearest town, you have to ensure that your army has leaders, your soldiers have food and money, and that your people are fed and protected from other invaders in your absence. In order to do all this, you must use your heroes not only as fighters, but also as farmers, explorers, and miners. When you run low on livestock, you can also ask your warriors to go on a cattle raid to...err... borrow some from your neighbors.

Keeping track of everything that's going on in just one kingdom can be difficult, and when you amass several kingdoms, you'll almost be forced to hire an aide to watch over a portion of your many holdings. The key to winning is a steady pursuit of new land, while making sure that everything is running smoothly back at home. Great warriors may win a few battles, but it's the economic genius with the most territory who will overcome in the long run.

Balor does have its share of drawbacks, including weak visuals, and a movement interface that becomes more and more frustrating as the game wears on. But on the whole, most of these problems are superficial. The main disadvantage of this title is that it's really difficult to play, and only the most dedicated strategy gamer is going to have the patience required to get the most out of this game. But if you're looking for a strategy game that



■ If you want to stay healthy, it's a good idea to pay your tribute early in the game. Until you've built up some strength, being coy will only get you killed.



■ By clicking on a tent, you can talk with any heroes in the area. At first your weak status will make them hesitant to join you, but as your power grows, so too will your company.



■ Each of the game's heroes is rated in several different stats that can change as they enter battle and accomplish missions. Once you get a heavy hitter on your side, make sure to keep them working at what they do best.

includes every facet of warfare in a fantasy world, or if you're a fan of earlier Koei titles, or if you are a Celtic history fanatic, then this is a title that you really must own. Otherwise Balor is likely to be more intimidating than fun.

—Trent C. Ward

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Detailed control, great historical background, absorbing storyline.

87%

LOWS: Confusing gameplay, poor instructions for beginners.

BOTTOM LINE: It's a great game for experienced strategy gamers, but the average gamers will find the game confusing.

Johnny Mnemonic

Category: Action/Adventure

Developer: Propaganda Code

Publisher: Sony Imagesoft, 2400 Broadway Ave., Suite 550, Santa Monica, CA 90404 (310) 449-2999

Required

Double-speed CD-ROM drive;
486DX2/66; SVGA;
8MB RAM; 2MB
Hard-drive space;
DOS 5.0; Windows
3.1

We Recommend

Triple-speed or
higher CD-ROM
drive; Pentium;
Accelerated VLB
or PCI card;
Supported sound
cards

M.S.R.P. \$69.95

William Gibson's cyberpunk thriller comes to life on your PC as one of the first true interactive movies.

ere's the deal: You're Johnny, a mnemonic data courier with a silicon chip — capable of holding 180 gigabytes of data — wet-wired into your brain.

Except that you've somehow crammed 320 gigs into it, and it's starting to seep.

See, that last data pickup in Beijing went south and now you've got 12 hours to find the download code before your brain fries from the overload.

Unless, of course, the Yakuza finds you first. They want that data, too, and they only need your head to get it, if you know what I mean.

At first glance Sony Imagesoft's new double-CD presentation of William Gibson's *Johnny Mnemonic* is a murky, unintelligible mess. My initial impression of this game was that it would make a great couple of battery-powered CD-ROM clocks.

It's so dark and kinetic that it's impossible to tell what's going on, let alone what you're expected to do. Then, gradually, almost against my will, I found its peculiar groove and I was virtually drawn into the cyberpunk world of mnemonic couriers, synthetically enhanced bodyguards and yowling Yakuza. So far, though, I appear to be in the minority.

Here's the problem. Everybody talks about "interactive movies," but so far no one's actually made one, although *Godzot*, *Under a Killing Moon*, and the *Quantum Gates* came awfully close (for completely different reasons). For the most part, the countless valiant, but failed, attempts did little more than prove that video sequences and lovely rendered animations alone do not an IM (interactive movie) make.

And that's where *Johnny* makes the grade. Unlike, say, Tsunami's *Flash Traffic* — where the washed-out video stops every few seconds to ask you, "what now, boss?", or *The Daedalus Encounter's* almost modular puzzle-based approach, *Johnny's* full-motion video is non-stop (you know — like a "movie") with letterboxed Windows Of Opportunity (WOOs) cropping up whenever you can affect the flow.

It's a bit like *Dragon's Lair*, but you don't die every time you miss a WOO and there are very few "wrong" moves. When a WOO appears, use one of eight user-definable keys to look left or right, move in the appropriate direction, use an object, download your cargo (hopefully), and punch, block and kick in real-time first-person fight scenes against a 6'8" gunman (L.A. Lakers' Kurt Rambis), a significantly enhanced bodyguard (Penthouse megababe Julie Strain), and more. If you do miss a WOO (a good title for a Dr. Seuss book, by the way) the scene loops until you make up your mind.

This, of course, is where most players will groan and say, "What a load of crap!" and I can't blame 'em. Because it succeeds where all the others have failed, *Johnny* will seem unfamiliar, confusing and, yes, irritating until you discover its elusive rhythm. But the rhythm is there, I assure you, especially if you haven't read the short story or seen the critically savaged film.

Now, just because it really works as an interactive movie doesn't mean that *Johnny* doesn't have its CyberBummers. The system requirements alone pretty much ensure that the majority of PC's will deliver

abysmal performance (the audio was totally out of synch, even on my P100), and the Save Game system returns you to the BEGINNING of the saved scene (before you've won that important fight or searched that room).

Every time *Johnny* picks up some useful item he stuffs it inside his Rick Deckard raincoat like some hyper Harpo Marx — it's a wonder he can even walk



Johnny checks out his own personnel file at Ralf's — the low-down dirty rat who sold him out.



Pretty is as Pretty does. Julie Strain's character Pretty has a Realistic Personality, among other things.

with all of that stuff clanking around in there. And the game's supposed multi-million dollar production looks more like a dingy episode of Fox TV's "VR.5" than *Blade Runner*.

Still, it's a rare treat to find a game that delivers on its promise, even if the result is bound to be an acquired taste.

—Scott Wolf



Johnny Mnemonic is hosted by a style, but the Options Interface (big on the GobbieNet Girl), is standard Windows.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

RIGHTS: It's a step in the right direction for IM games.

LOWS: Substantial system requirements; initially confusing; not much replay value.

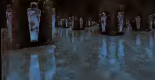
BOTTOM LINE: An acquired taste; if you're a traditionalist who shuns the video movement or have a slow system, forget it!

80%

NO DOGS.

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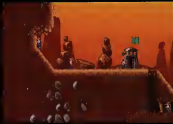
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DOOM - ID SOFTWARE

DOOM is THE virtual reality game in which you are plunged into a brutal 3D world. To escape alive, you must outfight legions of gory hordes and solve Doom's lethal puzzles. You play a marine soldier equipped with a variety of weapons and technological artifacts, but in the end it comes down to who's tougher: you or them. DOOM. Where the Only Safe Place... is Behind the Trigger.



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WUKUNG

Category: Graphic adventure

Developer: Abudoe

Publisher: Abudoe Software Inc., 320 108th Ave NE, Suite 500, Bellevue, WA 98004 (206) 462-8303

Required

486/25; Double Speed CD-ROM; Windows 3.1; 4MB RAM; SVGA; Mouse; Sound card

We Recommend

486/66 or higher, 16MB RAM

M.S.R.P.: \$39.95

When *Wukung* came to me for review, I figured that any game starring a monkey-god as the main character can't be all bad. Besides, there's a pig-demon and a merman, too. With such original characters, how could this game go wrong? All kinds of ways, as it turns out...

Take the background story, for instance, told in the agonizingly long introduction. The game is set in ancient China, as the Emperor attempts to locate the Book of Governance—a source of infinite wisdom. He sends his loyal monk SamChang to search for the book, and during the journey, SamChang meets Wukung, monkey extraordinaire. The pair then makes friends with Eddy, the pig-demon, and Seamour, a denizen of the aquatic deep. It might not be brilliant stuff, but it turned out to be more interesting than the game itself.

You actually start the game after Wukung is sent off to find some food, and when he returns, SamChang, Eddy, and Seamour have disappeared. Your mission is to find the missing members of your party, and then help SamChang find the mystical book.

The interface is pure point-and-click, with your character's inventory onscreen at all times, avoiding the need to bring up an inventory menu. This simplicity is nice, although the interface often feels vague and unreliable.

The game tries hard to be amusing, but it's never funny as much as corny. The voice acting is just bad, and reminds me of a poorly dubbed movie, with voices

It seems impossible, but Abudoe has managed to create the one instance in known history when monkeys just aren't any fun.

Crossing the River Step-by-Step



1 Even though Wukung can supposedly fly (he is a god, you know), you still need to figure out how to get him over this river. First you'll need an axe to get rid of this snake...

2 Then toss the meat you got from the butcher into the water, and...

3 Voilà! A bridge provided by some crocodiles. Don't make any missteps!

that never really match the characters. In fact, the whole game reeks of Bad Translation Syndrome, as though it had been translated from Chinese to English by a Korean electronics firm.

Another complaint, and one of my pet peeves in a voice-acted adventure, is the fact that there are no subtitles. The problem was compounded by the fact that the controls for music and sound volume didn't work on any of the computers I tested the title on, so most of the conversations were drowned

out by the music. Although I probably didn't miss much, it was annoying to have to put my ear to the speakers to try to pick up some tid-bit I might need later.

If nothing else, *Wukung* has entertaining, cartoonish graphics going for it. But they're not good enough to justify the

incredibly long loading time between scenes, and the slow character movement throughout the game. You actually start to dread having to go back to check something two screens back, because it could easily take you three minutes to get there!

The bottom line? *Wukung* falls on just about every level. There's just nothing to recommend about it, unless you're a connoisseur of bad gaming.

—Michael Wolf



You control all the supernatural characters. Each has his own inventory and different challenges to overcome. You can switch between them by clicking on their portraits.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: It's a promising idea. There's some nice cartoon animation, and the interface is easy to use.

LOWS: Long loading times, terrible voice acting, lack of subtitles, etc., etc.


BOTTOM LINE: Man, this game sure is bad...

37%

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★★★★ / ★★★★★

PC Gamer:

91% Rating

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Product Information Number 133

FX Fighter

Category: Fighting game

Developer: Argonaut Software

Publisher: GTE Interactive Media, P.O. Box 4358, Carlsbad, CA 92018-4358
(800) GTE-TODAY [438-86329]

Required	We Recommend
CD-ROM drive; 486DX/33MHz; 4MB RAM; 16MB hard- drive space; MS- DOS 5.0 or later; VGA	Double-speed CD- ROM drive; 486DX2/50MHz; 8MB RAM; VLB video card; Supported sound card; Gamepad(s)

M.S.R.P. \$59.95

Make no mistake: *FX Fighter* is the finest fighting game ever created for the PC. It may not boast the same level of graphics you see in games like *Toshinden* or *Tekken* that were designed for dedicated videogame systems, but in the two departments that count the most in a fighting game — animation and gameplay — *FX Fighter* scores nearly perfect marks.

The setup for this punch-and-kick-fest is pretty good, at least as far as these sort of games go. Far in the future, there are eight known civilizations in the Milky Way, co-existing peacefully mainly

Move over, *Mortal Kombat* —

FX Fighter just hit town, and PC fighting games won't be the same again.

because no single power can risk a multi-front war. Things changed dramatically, though, with the appearance of a "wandering planet" called Anarchy, capable of destroying an entire fleet of spaceships in the blink of an eye.

The fate of the galaxy seemed hopeless, but then came something of a reprieve: Rygil, leader of Anarchy, promised to spare the Milky Way if a fighter from one of the eight races could beat him in hand-to-hand combat.

That's where you step in. After choosing to play as one of the eight combatants (see sidebar), you must defeat your seven fellow warriors before you can square off against Rygil for the final showdown. Win a bout, and your opponent's home world is blasted to smithereens; lose, and the same thing happens to your planet.

Like I said, it's a decent little background story. But what makes *FX Fighter* so special is its ultra-smooth animation, well-balanced gameplay, and crunching sound effects. Argonaut Software used a patented motion-cap-



FX Fighter features a Wide View option, designed to help the game run at an acceptable rate on slower systems. Unless you have a Pentium, this is the view you should use if you want to have all details turned on.



And I thought cats didn't like water! Here's Shebe, a member of the cat-like Feran race, set to take on Sren on the telekinetic's home turf.

ture technology called Brender (short for "Blazing Render") to create the movement for the fighters, and the results are utterly convincing. Their motions are so fluid, so lifelike, that even with the detail levels turned down to accommodate a slower system you'll still have no problem suspending your disbelief. When Jake lands a roundhouse kick to an opponent's head, you can almost feel the impact.

The graphics, though good, are probably the weakest part of the game. Non-human fighters like the robot Cyben 30 and the praying mantis Venam look pretty convincing, but the closer a character gets to being human the less impressive he/she looks, even with detail levels cranked to maximum. But in any game involving movement — whether it's flying, fighting, or driving — looks are secondary to a smooth frame rate, and once you get a gamepad in your hands and start pulling off deadly combos you won't give a damn that the graphics are a little muddy here and there.

Like the arcade game *Virtua*



Here's an interesting matchup: The lightning quick Kiko against the slow but powerful Cyben 30. If he can corner her, he'll grind her to a pulp — unless she uses a knee throw to flip him out of the ring and win by default.

How Do You Make Sheba Do The Blitzkrieg Bop?

It's great that each character in *FX Fighter* can perform over 40 different special moves and combos, but there's one small fly in the ointment: The manual only lists the most basic offensive and defensive maneuvers. Now, this is understandable — real arcade fans love figuring out special moves on their own — but some of us just don't have the patience to try out seemingly endless combinations of directional-pad pushes and button presses.

But help is available, particularly if you have Internet access. GTE Interactive says that a complete move list — including "hidden" moves — can be found at the *FX Fighter* World Wide Web site (<http://www.imt.gte.com>). Actually, the hidden moves were, well, hidden at the Web site for a few weeks: The only hint that they were available at all

was a reference in the *FX Fighter* FAQ. GTE plans to have the moves in a more prominent location by the time you read this.

Another Web site that plans on having a lot of *FX Fighter* cheats, codes, tips and more is DigitalE (<http://www.unm.edu/n/home/m447/reinb001/digidig/stele.html>), a non-profit online zine created by Jon Reinberg. DigitalE also features reviews, a readers survey, and links to other gaming-related sites. Check it out, and tell him ya read about in the PC Gamer site.

There will doubtless be lots of places on the Internet where you can find move lists, but we thought we'd get you started with a couple of special moves for each fighter. Next month, we'll give you the complete list in Strategy Central, just in

case you had trouble merging onto the Infobahn. Note: These screenshots are taken from the character selection screen, and don't represent how the characters look during play.

Basic FX Fighter Controls

F	.....Forward
B	.....Back
U	.....Up
D	.....Down
P	.....Punch
K	.....Kick
+ /	.....Performs actions together
/	.....Diagonal (F/U means jump toward opponent)
→	.....Perform next move while first is executing
lower case	.....Tap controller quickly
UPPER CASE	.....Hold controller briefly



ASHRAF

The meditative Ashraf hails from the planet Karlak. He carries himself with dignity and grace, but you'd better watch out if he gets in your face!

Moves:

- Fireball: b, F+P
- Energy Push: f, d, F+P



CYBEN

Cyben 30 looks upon bio-organisms with contempt — and if you get too close to him he'll use his devastating strength to prove he's serious about it.

Moves:

- Rotor Arm Attack: f, F+P
- Sweep: D/B+K



JAKE

Jake is probably the easiest character to get accustomed to. He has plenty of brute force, but he's a fairly quick mover, too.

Moves:

- Pick-up Throw: f, d, B+P
- Roundhouse Kick: B+K
- → F+P into Head Butt



KIKO

The Kanti warrior Kiko makes up for her lack of muscle with lightning speed and keen sense of attack. She's also pretty good with shuriken.

Moves:

- Knee Throw: B/D+P
- Double Kick: f, K



MAGNON

Your best bet against this rock-creature is to work your way close to the ringside, then try to knock him out with a combination.

Moves:

- Bearhug: B+K (Up close)
- Toss Throw: F/D+P (Up close, when opponent is ducking)



SHEBA

It's difficult to defend against Sheba's crouching attacks. Keep your distance to lure her into a standing position, where she's less dangerous.

Moves:

- Face Rake: F, K (while crouching)



SIREN

Siren's almost as fast as Kiko — and has telekinetic powers to boot!

Moves:

- Salimon Kick: f, f, K
- Back Throw: B/D+P (Up close)



VENAM

He's wiry, but tough! Let Venam get in close, and he'll try to make a meal out of you.

Moves:

- Leg Throw: b, F+K



The graphics in *FX Fighter* aren't quite up to what you'll see in games running on dedicated game machines like the Saturn or Play Station, but the blazing action and crunching sound effects make it easy to overlook any visual shortcomings.

FX Fighter employs a "flying camera" that's constantly panning and zooming to make it feel as though the action's taking place in three dimensions. Unlike that game, however, *FX Fighter* does allow you to move along three planes: up and down, backward and forward, and left and right (albeit at 45-degree angles).

I've heard some videogame nuts argue that being able to move along a

third axis doesn't add anything to gameplay, but I've got to disagree; several times I've managed to catch an opponent off-guard by rolling out two or three times, then launching an attack from a new position. At the very least, it adds a new visual element that helps keep things fresh and exciting.

The sound effects aren't extensive, but they're brutally effective; the sound of kicks and punches finding their mark reminds me of a kung-fu movie. You also get a little in-fight banter: When Venam (the praying mantis guy) throws you to the ground, he leaps into the air and squeals "Meal!" before bending over and gnawing your shoulder. Knock Ashraf (the Karlakian) to the mat and he lets out a low cry, sort of like Bruce Lee, while Kiko (a Kanti) shrieks and squawks as she moves in for the kill. There are several tracks of dance music that play from the CD during the game, but it doesn't jibe with the frenzied combat, and most players will turn it down or off.

The only things wrong with *FX Fighter* are matters of omission, rather than flawed design. The manual, in the form of a stylish comic book, is

sparse in the extreme; no mention is made of the fact that the F1-F5 keys toggle things like texture, shading, and resolution during gameplay, and no special moves are explained (see sidebar). And an instant replay feature would have been nice, as would a feature to install a big chunk of the game on the hard drive so you can play your own music CDs should you tire of the disco beat.

But these are trifles compared to the intense action *FX Fighter* serves up. If you've got enough computing muscle (I'd say a 486/50MHz with VLB is the true bare minimum), check this game out. You'll never look at a PC fighting game the same way again.

—Steve Poole

PC GAMER	FINAL VERDICT
HIGH: The best fighting game ever created for the PC. Period.	94%
LOW: Sparse manual; a few extra features like instant replay or a full-install would have been nice.	
BOTTOM LINE: A stunning and impressive piece of work that sets a new standard in PC fighting games.	

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...Until Now.

DUST

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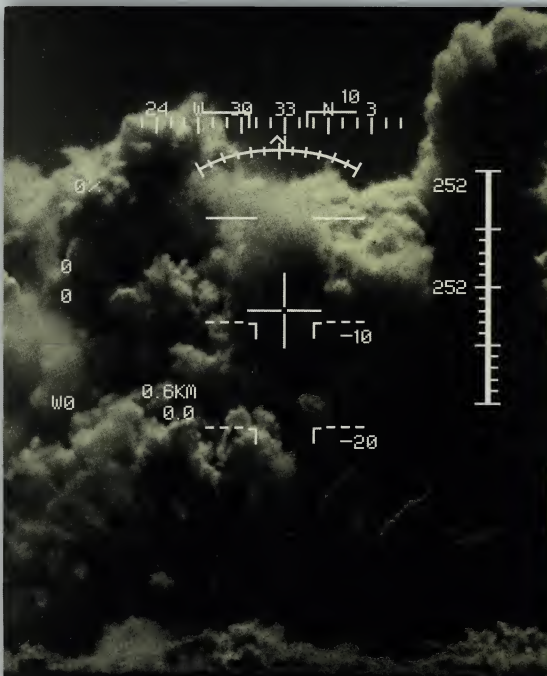
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GTE entertainment

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Product Information Number 102



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THE RIDE MAY GET A LITTLE BUMPY.**

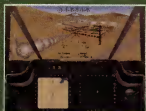
APACHE

The Combat Helicopter Simulation

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Product Information Number 120



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819-461-0948

Bloodwings

Category: Action-adventure

Developer: BAP Interactive

Publisher: MPCA Interactive, 1401 Ocean Ave., Suite 301, Santa Monica, CA 90401 (800) 245-4525

Required	We Recommend
Double-speed CD-ROM drive; 486/33MHz; DOS 5.0 or later; 8MB RAM; 2MB hard-disk space; SVGA; Sound card	Pentium; 10MB hard-drive space; Mouse

M.S.R.P.: \$59.95

As this debut title from MPCA Interactive opens, an old crone sitting by a fireplace slowly looks up at you and says, "Beware — you are entering the world of Pumpkinhead!" And, as exciting as that may sound to any gamer, you should heed her warning: This is one of the most lethargic and confusing games I've had to endure in quite a while.

Based on the soon-to-be-released *Pumpkinhead II* movie, *Bloodwings: Pumpkinhead's Revenge* is part first-person action game, part graphic adventure. When you start the game, you're moving through the Netherworld, blasting ghosts called Xenotropes with plasma bolts. Toast one of

Horror fans may jump at the chance to meet one of the baddest creatures on film, but in this case you should look before you leap.

these things, and it leaves behind a whirlwind that can zip you off to the "Derm Tunnels." It's here that you get some action by moving a hand icon around the screen to grab crystals that jut from the walls, floor, and ceiling of the tunnel.

Back in the Netherworld, you'll use these crystals in "Interactive Movie Portals" to view short scenes from the movie, plus some video footage shot specifically for the game. This is how the plot is

revealed, and it's pretty standard teen-horror stuff: Kids out for kicks wind up screwing around with the supernatural and accidentally conjure a ghastly creature. In this case, it's Pumpkinhead, the hillbilly god of revenge who first graced the screen in the cult-classic horror flick bearing his name.

In theory, BAP Interactive's approach to incorporating live-action video footage seems like a pretty creative way to break up some of the monotony first-person shooters are prone to, while providing a cure for the "sit-and-watch" syndrome associated with digitized video. Instead of simply watching a video, you'll have to check the entire scene carefully for any objects you can snatch and take back to the Netherworld; if you think you missed something, just pop in another crystal and check it out again. The objects you grab here are supposed to help you sur-



Find one of these portals and pop a crystal into it, and you're whisked away to the world of the living.

live long enough to defeat Pumpkinhead and save any souls he's dragged into his lair.

But it's hard to pay attention to what's being said in these clips — or to appreciate the acting, or even to figure out what the hell's going on — because you're frantically moving your mouse all over the screen trying to grab any objects you might need.

And while the mix of gaming styles has its merits, the whole affair is ruined by choppy, clumsy animation — basically, this game runs like *Doom* on thoriazine. On my 486/66MHz with a VLB video card, the frame rate is, well, pretty abysmal — a situation made even more puzzling by the fact that the graphics are adequate at their best, and butt-ugly at their worst.

If I'm going to watch a horror film, I'd rather see the whole thing the way it was meant to be seen, in a theater or on my TV, rather than playing a third-rate shooter for a few minutes, then watching intermittent clips of blocky, grainy video. About the only good things that came out of my time with *Bloodwings* are that I now know to save some money and wait for the movie's release on video — and you know not to buy this game.

— Steve Poole



The first creatures you encounter in the Periphery (the first of three levels in *Bloodwings*' Netherworld) are the ghostly Xenotropes. Killing one takes you to the next level.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Easy to install, high-quality sound effects and music.

LOWS: Choppy animation, so-so graphics, uninteresting gameplay.

BOTTOM LINE: Even the most die-hard horror fans won't stick with this one long enough to make it worthwhile.

46%

PC CD-ROM

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Product Information Number 141

Exploration

Category: Trading/Strategy

Developer: Software 2000

Publisher: Interactive Magic, P.O. Box 13491, Research Triangle Park, NC 27709 (919) 461-0722

Required

CD-ROM drive;
386SX/25MHz; DOS
5.0 or higher; 4 MB
RAM; VGA; Mouse

We Recommend

Double-speed CD-
Rom drive; 486;
Supported sound
card; 6MB RAM

M.S.R.P. \$59.95

One of the most interesting things about *Exploration* is the fact that it's the debut offering of a new company, Interactive Magic, founded by the legendary "Wild Bill" Stealey — the man who made MicroProse the sim-and-strategy giant it is today. It's also the first of several games licensed by I-Magic from the highly regarded German firm Software 2000.

Exploration is the latest in



It pays to keep on the good side of the Church — which means period donations, the heftier the better.



Crewmen and soldiers are available at the Pub. So is information, but it's usually so generic that it's not worth the informer's asking price.

Here's the latest explore-and-conquer epic, and while it won't win any prizes for originality, it's still a lot of fun.

a long line of sea-faring strategy-and-trading games — a sub-genre that took on new vitality during the Christopher Columbus celebrations in 1992. Play begins in 1480 and continues until 1789 (the outbreak of the French Revolution); the game advances in rounds, each representing one year.

Five great historical captains are represented (Columbus, da Gama, La Maire, Bougainville, and James Cook — why did I almost write "James Kirk"?), and each can be played by a human or by the computer. Random maps — all blacked-out to begin with, of course — assure variety, although you can play on a real-world map if you choose.

All activity begins on the three-panel port screen where you'll click on various hot-spot buildings to access important functions. At the trader's, you buy provisions and sell goods brought back from your voyages; at the pub, you recruit crewmen and soldiers; and at the shipyard, you commission new vessels or sell old ones for salvage.

There's also a banker, who safeguards your strongbox. Before embarking on a voyage, be sure to visit him and transfer funds from the bank to your ship, so you can afford to start a town. You can also get a loan, at a surprisingly lenient rate. A visit to the historian allows you to see how you're ranked against your competitors and gives you a chance to invest in new ship and weapons' technology.

It's also a good idea to visit the church periodically, and leave as hefty an offering as you can afford. Neglecting this chore can result in excommunication, which has a disastrous effect on your career.

Once you're on the high seas, just sail around until you find some land. Put an expedition ashore to explore, and when you find a likely-looking spot, build a settlement. The process is easy enough, but just claiming a patch of land costs 5000



Here's the main screen from *Exploration*; the small map in the upper left shows what percentage of the world has been explored.



Settlements near rivers are best for agriculture; place towns near mountains for mining operations.

doubloons, and that's only the beginning of your settlement.

The cheapest plantation, for sugar production, also costs 5000 doubloons, and returns only a modest profit over a long stretch of time. Tobacco and cotton are more profitable, and ore mines most profitable of all, but you simply won't be able to afford mines until about half a century into the game, if then.

Developing the settlements is another key to long-range success. Building a fort increases your security and strategic influence, building a church increases your popularity with the clergy, and building ports dramatically increases your ability to explore and trade.

Also be sure to build warehouses near all functioning plantations. You may have to build more than one, if your mines and farms are up to speed, since all production will cease when your storage facilities are full and won't resume



There are 15 kinds of military units available, and even the cheapest is expensive — but without garrisons, your colonies are sitting ducks.

What the Well-Prepared Conquistador Should Know:

There's no need to carry a full crew on your maiden voyage (if you want to establish a settlement, you can do it with only a handful of men). It's better to take the minimum safe number of sea-dogs and cram the holds with all the water and biscuits you have room for. This enables you to stay at sea a long time, cover a lot of territory, and scope-out likely sites for future colonies.

Conversely, you should always take a few extra hands in case of plague, famine, or other disasters. If your crew dwindles below the minimum number required to work the ship, you'll just drift helplessly.

Normal Indian villages should be negotiated with rather than pillaged. The number of trinkets required to win friends varies from place to place, but so far I've not found any tribe that asked for more than 21.

Settlements established near Indian villages have a built-in labor supply, too, so you don't have to ferry as many settlers from home in order to reach full production.

A special case are the Inca villages scattered here and there. True to the bloody history of the period, you gain advantage from their discovery only by attacking and looting them. You can probably win by attacking either with one unit of soldiers or an expedition of 25 or more — below that number, and the Incas can usually defend themselves. You need gold in this game, and the Incas have it.

From time to time, a pirate will offer his services at the pub. If you decide to make use of his ship and crew, be sure to check out the vessel's condition before sending it to sea. Pirate ships, not surprisingly, are subject to more wear and tear than ordinary vessels, and you may have to pay for repairs before you get any benefit from this deal.

until you remove some of the contents.

Not only are the various upgrades costly, but each is dependent on population growth. Somewhat curiously, the colonists in this game seem incapable of reproduction, so the only way to increase their numbers is to physically haul new people from your home port — a tedious process at best.

There's also a military aspect to things, as various nations declare war on you, raid your colonies, and ambush your galleons. Fifteen types of unit are available, ranging from simple crossbowmen to heavy artillery. There's no real tactical element, however; units just lob volleys at each other until the strongest force wins. Ditto for ship-to-ship combat, although such factors as hull and rigging deterioration seem to have an effect along with the armament of the units.

Naturally, there are random events thrown in to keep you from getting complacent: storms, warehouse fires, Indian ambushes, and the odd plague or two, but these don't seem as frequent, or as devastating in their consequences, as they are in other games of this type.



On the left, an ordinary Indian village; on the right, an Inca city. Make peace with one; make pieces out of the other.

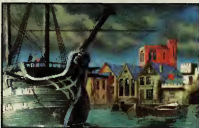
And that's about it: explore, colonize, develop resources, set up trade routes, fend off enemies, and try to grow rich. These games have a powerful, built-in appeal for lots of us, and I had a rattling good time playing *Exploration*. If it lacks the depth and subtlety of *Machiavelli* or *Colonization*, it's easier to learn and almost as addictive.

But, aside from its lack of originality, there are a few structural weaknesses that knock several points off the bottom-line rating. The VGA-only graphics, for one thing, are chunkier and coarser than what we're used to — good for three years ago, maybe, but decidedly mediocre by the standards of late 1995.

Then there's the time-scale. Granted, travel in a 16th-century sailing vessel was

both slow and dicey, but the one-year-per-round scale makes the implementation of any coherent strategy a very, very long-term business. I finally had to write instructions to myself, as the time-lag between thinking up a plan and being able to execute it was often so long that I forgot what I had intended to do.

And the interface is damned peculiar. In this type of game, you usually left-click to move and right-click to examine something. In this game, it's just the opposite...except when you're making the first move of a newly formed expedition, where you'll left-click to set the expedition on its way. But after that, you go back to right-clicking again. Go figure.



Home port, where you bank, recruit, buy supplies, and commission new ships.

Also irritating is the necessity of forming an "expedition" for the routine movement of goods from warehouse to cargo hold and vice versa. Why not a simple "transfer" or "unload" command? And you can't just move goods as an expedition — you HAVE to have at least one person accompany them (how that one person is going to schlepp 79 tons of sugar, I haven't a clue...). If you forget to include a person with your expedition, the game simply voids the trip, and you have to start the process all over again.

While *Exploration* has its flaws, it is nevertheless a solidly entertaining game. I found it a little surprising, though, that I-Magic decided to launch its product line with a game that is so generic and so similar to other, already fairly popular, titles.

If you've had your fill of *Colonization*, *Uncharted Waters*, or *Machiavelli*, you can pass on this game without missing anything. If, on the other hand, you haven't tried one of these games, you probably will enjoy *Exploration*.

—William R. Trotter

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: A good, solid, addition to a very popular genre.

LOWS: Sub-par graphics and a decidedly weird interface, too similar to other strategy/trading games.

BOTTOM LINE: There's nothing new here, but if you haven't burned out on colonization games, you'll have a good time.

76%

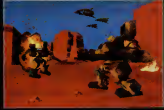
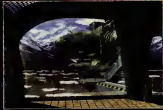
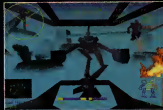


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Product Information Number 86

Kingdom: The Far Reaches

Category: Action/Adventure

Developer: Virtual Image and Interplay

Publisher: Interplay Productions, 17922 Fitch Avenue, Irvine, CA 92714 (800) 963-4263

Required

Double-speed CD-ROM; 386SX or faster; 555K conventional memory; Supported sound card

We Recommend

486DX2/50; 8MB RAM

M.S.R.P.: \$44.95

Kingdom: The Far Reaches is another of those "interactive" adventure games that just doesn't reach far enough.

As I fired up this latest adventure title from Interplay, I couldn't help but be reminded of *Dragon's Lair*, the Laserdisc coin-op game that was a hit in the 1980s.

When *Dragon's Lair* first came out, I was floored by its graphics, but frustrated by its lackluster gameplay; it was like watching a cartoon, with reaction time as the only critical element. You'd walk into a room, a monster of some sort would appear, and you'd have mere milliseconds to react before something killed you — usually you'd die a few times before you figured out by process of elimination what you were supposed to do.

Still, the graphics — actual cartoons created by Disney veteran Don Bluth — were beautiful, the sound was amazing, and even though *Dragon's Lair* wasn't much of a game, it was a blast to watch. *Kingdom: The Far Reaches* can be described in almost exactly the same way.

Kingdom has its virtues: a good musical score, above-average graphics, and excellent voice characterizations.



Lathen prepares to complete his heroic quest!



Our hero, roasting over a sacrificial barbecue. How did he get here? Did he lose a fight? Did he misinterpret clues? Nope — he just walked through a harmless-looking door.

The problem lies in the gameplay itself, and in several nagging little details that make the game more irritating than fun.

Like *Dragon's Lair*, *Kingdom's* fantasy world is limited to a very linear path where one wrong step ends in death. A prime example of this: As you walk along the path to a castle, a group of tiger statues spring to life and kill you. That's it: No fight, no flight — just a quick, inexplicable death.

That's not an isolated event, either; this sort of thing happens again and again in *Kingdom*. You have no warning that certain death awaits if you take a wrong turn. There's no intelligence involved, no way to avoid death through cunning — only endless trial-and-error.

Some other, minor things conspire to make the game more a chore than a pleasure. The voice-overs are generally of a higher quality than those in most games, but at times very important messages were unclear.

And character interaction is inconsistent at best. Some encounters reflected things that I had done elsewhere, and some of them didn't. It seemed no matter how many times I walked into the wise woodsman's clearing, he introduced himself and told me the same tale.

In the end, this adventure just seemed flat and lifeless. If you



Which door should you choose? The wrong decision often means instant death.

never got enough of *Dragon's Lair*, and if you don't mind learning the hard way, you might like it. On the other hand, if you demand the most out of your adventure gaming dollar, keep shopping.

—John Robinson

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Excellent sound and music. If I make you nostalgic for *Dragon's Lair*.

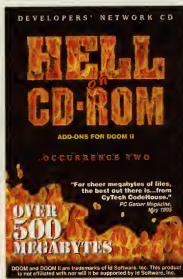
LOWS: It's repetitive, frustrating, and almost arbitrary in the many ways it kills you.

BOTTOM LINES: It just doesn't seem to have been made by people who play games.

60%

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Snowy Climes and Satanic Courses

You never know what you're going to get when it comes to adding on to great games. We gamers can only wish for the best, hoping against hope that the add-ons and new scenarios don't ruin our love of the original game. This month we take a look at two such add-ons — one that worked for a game that was really great in the first place, and one that only kinda sorta worked for a game that has seen more than its share of add-ons.

Magic Carpet's Hidden Worlds

Magic Carpet is just about the single most impressive game I've seen in the past year. Not only does it put a fresh new spin on an already clichéd genre (the first-person action game), but it features some terrific play and often jaw-dropping graphics effects. Bullfrog not only outdid themselves with it, but they outdid everyone else as well.

Of course, never let it be said that you can have too much of a good thing. For those who went at the first *Magic Carpet* missions tooth and nail, beating the artificial opponent only to go back and

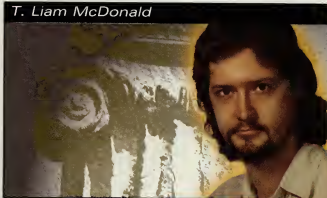
replay against a live opponent, there is some hope. Electronic Arts/Bullfrog have given us *Magic Carpet: The Hidden Worlds*, featuring 25 new single-player, and ten new multi-player, worlds to restore.

As the opening "story" tells us, you must now travel to restore worlds "bereft of the sun's warming influence." In other words, it's cold in them thar hills. These ice worlds don't seem that much different from the regular worlds; they're just whiter. The stark landscape makes spotting some creatures easier, and some a bit harder, but mostly it's just a new graphic set.

Gameplay itself, however, has a changed quite a bit. The

Homing Meteor is weaker than the regular kind.

On the plus side, all the other spells are more effective and more powerful, and you automatically begin with all spells at their highest level. On the minus side, you'll need that extra power, and badly: these are some really bone-crushing levels. The first world sports a stampeding horde of griffins and enough pesky worms to make just getting across the first hill a challenge.



T. Liam McDonald

Wall of Fire spell is gone, replaced with a Homing Meteor spell. This is the same as a regular meteor, except (surprise) it homes on the nearest enemy. What you get in added accuracy you give up in power, though, since the

It's always a crap shoot when it comes to adding to great games. This month, Tommy discovers that if the original game was great, then it's a safe bet that the add-ons are going to be just as good.



The *Hidden Worlds* data disk features 25 fiendishly difficult arctic add-ons for *Magic Carpet*.

A much-demanded feature has also been added to make game play more palatable: a single in-game save slot is available by pressing Alt-S. When you next press Alt-L — in the game — you go back to this save spot immediately.

Unfortunately, *Hidden Worlds* appears to have disabled the much-needed cheat-code RATTY. (No new code has appeared yet, but I'm sure it's kicking around out there. We'll keep you posted on any codes that we find.)

The action in *Hidden Worlds* gets pretty heavy-duty at times, so unless you mastered *Magic Carpet*, you might want to wait before picking up the add-on.

A Devil of a Course

OK, now we detour into the weird. I'm not sure what goes on out there in the heart of Utah, where Access makes its home, but man, they must be smokin' some wacky rope if their past couple of releases are any indication. First was the lackluster *Links 396 CD*, and now we have one for the I-just-don't-get-it file: the *Devil's Island Fantasy Course* for *Links 396* and *Microsoft Golf*. Now, fantasy courses are fun: take Loyal Chapman's famous golf prints for The Greenwich Workshop, with golf holes imagined over Victoria Falls, Wall Street, the Grand Canyon, and in other unlikely places.

Access had much the same idea, building a course on the volcanic "Devil's Island." But this is something you're supposed to play, and these serpentine, well-nigh impossible holes make for



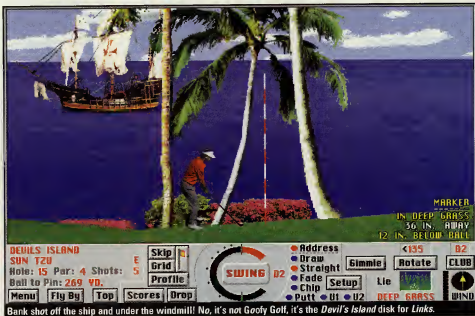
A stampede of griffins in the first *Hidden World* of *Magic Carpet's* add-on disk.

some pretty scenery, but some unsatisfying play.

Located in the heart of the Bermuda Triangle, this island course features the pre-requisite eighteen holes, set amidst lush scenery along the lines of Mauna Kea. Dotted the landscape are Mayan icons, statues of griffins, wrecked pirate ships, and a few Mayan pyramids. Pins are topped with skulls, and tee boxes are often flanked by staturary. Sharp volcanic mountains rise on one side of the island, while lagoons and inlets make for intriguing water hazards.

Altogether, it's the most visually interesting course from Access yet, with odd scenery used just conservatively enough to keep the game from becoming miniature golf. But only just...

Nice as some of these holes may look, playing them is another matter. The term "dogleg" is usually meant to describe a gentle turn in the fairway, not a hairpin bend around a pyramid, and certainly not a circular fairway. The serpentine paths most of these greens follow make any notion of developing a decent long-range game a joke. You can't drive in a circle, so you often wind up chipping your way around a fairway to get to the green. With an average yardage of about 500 per hole



and a top of 633, this makes for a frustrating, rather than genuinely challenging, game. Add to this greens that are often radically terraced — and sometimes divided — and you have a mess of a course.

Even so, there are some fun holes. The fourteenth, a 250-yard drive to a tiny island, calls for solid placement and some fancy putting, and the sixteenth requires a long drive to the fairway over territory that can, at best, be called obstructed. Bunker placement is unusually heavy, and though inelegant, makes for some challenging approaches.

There are not really any course obstacles per se, even though a giant statue lurks on one of the greens, but I did manage to bounce a ball off



the mast of the pirate ship. This course was obviously meant as a lark, and there's nothing at all wrong with that, as long as you know that's

what you're getting. If it doesn't play particularly well, at least it affords golfers some challenges they'd never find elsewhere.

EGG

Bug Patches

Blod Bowl Modem Patch: Adds modem play and fixes some known quirks in the game.

Crusader v.2.35: Addresses mostly saved-game and the Play-By-E-Mail problems.

Cyberia: New .EXE corrects problems with the game not saving milestones after the conference room.

Daedalus Encounter v.1.2: Fixes "all known bugs."

Descant v.1.4a (registered only): Will only run on a C:\ drive (thanks a lot).

Harpagon Classic for Windows 1.55b: Fixes a bug introduced in 1.55a when loading some scenarios.

Machiavelli, The Prince v.1.1: Fixes various bugs.

Rennegade: Battle for Jacob's Star v.1.1: Addresses several known bugs (Only works for the 80MB install of the game).

Road from Sumner to Appomattox v.1.23: 1) History recorder fixed for E-mail and saves. 2) Army commanders' ratings now slowly revealed in hidden-rating games. 3) excessive casualty burn when field units attack fortified cities fixed. 4) units accumulate experience at a slower rate. 5) units may lose experience taking on green replacements.

Shadows of Cairn v1.0.022: Adds "really easy mode" and cheats.

Shadows of Cairn v1.0.21-016: Fixes CD audio playback problems, adds joystick calibration profile, new sound effects and dungeon art. For DOS, there are added keyboard help files, revised sound drivers, and added help screens.

Stalingrad v.1.85: Addresses mostly saved-game and PBEM problems.

Super Street Fighter: Corrects music & sound problems, movement bugs detected in earlier versions, and gamepad calibration problems. Also includes an FAQ.

The Perfect General 2: Updates scenarios, including a resign feature as well as other small fixes. If you "destroy an enemy and take all the

towns, you will have the opportunity to quit the game.

U.S.S. Ticonderoga: Adds support for the Gravis UltraSound, Pro Audio Spectrum, and Ensoniq sound cards, and weapons onboard now display in a number format.

Virtual Pool Video Drivers: The newest video drivers as of June 20, 1995 for the full or demo version.

X-COM: Terror from the Deep v.2.0: Fixes various bugs.

Zephyr: Adds modem and network play (you know, the features it should have shipped with), as well as fixing a couple of video and head-set problems.

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Product Information Number 94

Diamonds in the Rough

Ood educational software does one thing really well: it creates an absorbing environment that either masks or enhances the educational content, depending on how inherently interesting the program designers think the content is. This month, I looked at a big bundle of

packages and found some excellent programs. They work because they tell their stories well and they package their exercises attractively. Only one program bears any resemblance to a drill and practice package; the others teach kids — and adults — how to think in an organized, logical fashion.

What the Heck Will Elroy Do Next? Elroy Goes Bugzerk

Take a tenacious ten-year-old, a wry hound dog, and a rare cyberbug called the Technoloptera, and you get a program with more spark than a meteor shower. First in a promising series titled *What the Heck Will Elroy Do Next?* from Headbone Interactive, *Elroy Goes Bugzerk* features an interesting cast backed up by an entertaining story line, an unusual graphic style, and a wonderful delivery, aimed at people 7 and older.

In *Elroy Goes Bugzerk*, a young boy and his faithful dog



In *Elroy Goes Bugzerk*, our fearless hero watches some ants milking their herd of aphids at the Bug Club.

Blue chase a rare bug, hoping to win the 10th Annual Insectathon and beat Elroy's arch-rival, Gordon Smugs. In the search for the elusive Technoloptera, Elroy and Blue explore a farm, two underground mazes, and an island. Kids help Elroy and his pal choose paths, find important tools, and negotiate with the moody (but resourceful) bug.

While the plot of the game is entertaining, other aspects of the program transform it from an ordinary adventure game into an extraordinary delight. The graphics are effective, although they aren't particularly sharp or smooth. In fact, they're flat and even a little

what they should do next. Elroy and Blue have no idea that they're on stage, and that adds to the immediacy and credibility of the story. Cartoonish as they seem, the characters are more realistic than the three-dimensional humanoids found in many more polished programs.

While laughing at the game, I had to wonder what the program was teaching me, but the occasional riddle machine and contest of wits



Although the graphics are primitive in *Elroy Goes Bugzerk*, they effectively convey the characters' emotions and personalities.

with the Technoloptera reminded me. I was learning about insects. And, like many good programs, *Elroy* also exercised my problem-solving skills by dragging me through mazes, visual riddles, and other brain puzzles.

Elroy's creators at Headbone Interactive also produced *Alphabonk Farm* for preschool kids. As regular readers know, I was not as happy with that program's sense of humor and, in some cases, I thought the content was inappropriate for young children. The company has since cleaned up *Alphabonk Farm*, but with that program in mind, I expected *Elroy* to be filled with bad jokes and clumsy intellectual exercises. On the contrary, *Elroy Goes Bugzerk* has just the right sense of humor for its intended audience, as well as a reasonably challenging and engaging game.

Of all the educational programs masquerading as adventure games, this is the best I've seen. Because of its fresh and clever graphics style as well as its well-told story, *Elroy Goes Bugzerk* takes the prize. I can't wait to see what *Elroy* does next.

The Lost Mind of Dr. Brain

Along the same lines of goofiness as *Elroy*, *Sierra's Dr. Brain* returns to the software scene and immediately transfers his intelligence into a lucky lab rat. In *The Lost Mind of Dr. Brain*, players must solve a wide selection of puzzles with increasing levels of difficulty in order to restore the genius' mind back to its owner.

Unlike *Elroy*, *The Lost*

Heidi E. H. Aycock



jaggy. But as primitive as they appear, the images impart more emotion and atmosphere than those in many more realistically illustrated programs. In the tradition of Eric Carle (*The Very Hungry Caterpillar*) or Crockett Johnson (*Harold and the Purple Crayon*), *Elroy's* artists used subtle shifts in simple shapes to speak volumes of information. A slight angle in the line that represents Elroy's mouth, an arch to the thin eyebrows, and suddenly brave *Elroy* is distressed. Another shifted angle, and you can tell the boy has conjured up a great idea.

The program's designers had a great idea, too; they wrote the program in such a way that you feel like you're eavesdropping on the characters. There are no lectures for the player's benefit. The characters don't stare in your direction while you choose

For your edification this month, our expert on kids' software introduces us to a handful of top-notch games that strike an almost perfect balance between entertainment and teaching.

Mind of Dr. Brain features more traditional graphics, but they are colorful and sharp. The high-quality animation features realistic lip movement perfectly synchronized with the sound. Each character has an interesting voice, and the dialog is clever — at times quite humorous.

But many programs feature good graphics and sound these days. Fewer can boast a truly interesting plot, but Dr. Brain can claim that honor, too. The program designers have crafted a fairly thin, but certainly sufficient, story line to tie the puzzles together. The race to restore Dr. Brain's intelligence, the various personae taken on by the lab rat in each puzzle, and the pedantic niece's explanations of the mental process being affected by each puzzle all spin an intriguing yarn that weaves its way through the program.

While the graphics and plot are well-crafted, the puzzles are the crowning jewels. Some puzzles were new to me: "Train of Thought," for example, requires players to direct balls across tracks and through switches in a particular order. Other puzzles were familiar: "Synaptic Cleft," for example, is a remake of an old Macintosh favorite called *Crystal Quest*.

Each puzzle features 20 levels of difficulty, which means they start out simply enough that players can build on their successes. I liked the puzzles so much, I wished Sierra would've put them out as stand-alone modules I could run during a slow Internet session or while I'm on hold with

some software company's overworked technical support staff.

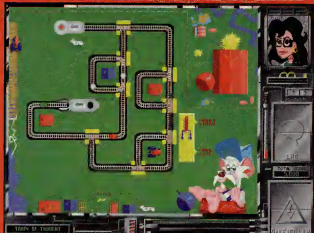
Like *Elroy goes Bugg-erk*, *The Lost Mind of Dr. Brain* has great educational value, but the lessons may be hard to find. Players develop their logic, their memory, their spatial perception and many other thinking skills as they work through Dr. Brain's games. These are the kinds of exercises that can't be duplicated in the real world, and this is the kind of educational program that offers all the value you and your kids deserve for your money.

Widget Workshop

Use Dr. Brain's puzzles to develop individual thinking skills; use *Widget Workshop* to practice integrating all those skills. Maxis' program, aimed at people 8 years old and older, is similar to *The Incredible Machine* or *Lemmings*, and presents you with a set of problems and challenges you to solve them with the tools it provides.

Widget Workshop teaches you to think through a process in much the same way a programmer constructs an algorithm. In fact, Maxis has only thinly disguised *Widget Workshop* as a construction set. The software actually teaches programming by offering a limited set of tools that take certain kinds of input and chew it up into certain kinds of output. People who master *Widget Workshop*'s clocks, counters, coin tossers,

The Lost Mind of Dr. Brain



In "Train of Thought," Dr. Brain challenges players to conduct several different-colored balls into the docking station in the correct order.

and switches are on their way to mastering the art of computer programming.

While *Widget Workshop* allows you to experiment with your own creations, it also features a long list of puzzles. Each puzzle challenges you to forge the correct links, pull the correct switches, or even stop the process at just the right time.

The manuals also suggest experiments and projects.

Most programs develop these problem-solving skills to some extent. In fact, I can't think of a single program released in the last few years that can't make the same claim. But *Widget Workshop* brings in the big guns. In a process-oriented package like this, kids learn to describe the problem they are solving, experiment with tools, learn from mistakes and successes, work patiently through the trial-and-error period, and put together all the information they gather.

In the real world, this is a



Dr. Brain's laboratory serves as a menu to ten brain-twisting puzzles in *The Lost Mind of Dr. Brain*.

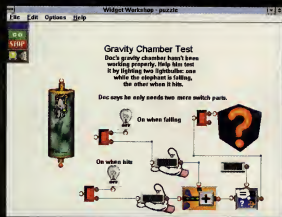
hard curriculum to teach. Failed experiments can be messy, and materials are limited. Growthpups can impatiently push kids through a project. Younger kids can scatter the precariously balanced parts of an unfinished machine. But on a computer, failed experiments are tidied up with the click of a button, the computer is an infinitely patient companion, and no one can trip over the digital elements of a complex invention.

The Best Values

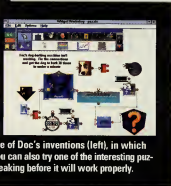
For my money, these three packages offer the most value for your money. You may not see immediate improvements in your kids' grades — the math scores may not improve; the spelling grades may still hover below your expectations. But your children will be learning to think systematically and creatively. Once they have their new problem-solving skills mastered, you can ask them to solve the problems of their grades. They may need a few gadgets and widgets, but they'll probably come up with something spectacular.

EEG

Widget Workshop



For an experiment that could only take place in software-space, try one of Doc's inventions (left), in which budding scientists can drop an elephant through a gravity chamber. You can also try one of the interesting puzzles (right), such as "Doc's Dog-Barking Machine," which needs a little tweaking before it will work properly.





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The Dog Days are Wilting the Wolf

As summer begins another unholly crusade across the midwest, bringing sweltering 90-plus-degree days and muggy mosquito-laden nights, I find it harder than ever to stay focused on my wolfy work, especially with the swimming pools of family and friends beckoning to me, ever beckoning...

Anyway, I figured this would be the perfect opportunity to clear my desk (or, more precisely, the floor surrounding my desk) and pass on some of the helpful material I've been accumulating since Lupine Online debuted 15 years ago (*Editor's Note*: that was during PC Gamer's final days as a trade magazine for vinyl siding salesmen; in writing an online column in those days, Scott was already proving what a forward-thinking kind of guy he is).

Buy The Book

You might think that the title of IDG's *America Online for Dummies* book is sort of redundant; after all, if you need a book to help you figure out AOL, you'll probably never understand it. But the fact is that, while AOL is deceptively easy to use, there are many tricks and shortcuts lying dormant in its infrastructure; the kind of stuff that can cut your monthly online time in half (by expediting e-mail in Flash Sessions and editing your favorite hangouts into a customized menu, for example).

Other America Online guides I've consulted are Alpha Books' *The Complete Idiot's Guide to America Online* (hmm...do I detect some kind of a theme developing here?), QTE's *Using America Online* and Prima Publishing's *Cruising America Online and Internet for Windows: America Online Edition*.

IDG's For Dummies

series also includes CompuServe for Dummies — an invaluable tool for getting the most out of CompuServe's massive database; Mosaic for Dummies and Volumes 1 and 2 of *Internet for Dummies* — publications for those of you ready to explore beyond the friendly confines of the major commercial services. Don't let your pride prevent you from picking up any of these titles — they're as amusing as they are informative.

Once you're out there, Prima's *Internet After Hours* and McGraw-Hill's *Internet Insider* and *Internet Yellow Pages* can provide directions for some interesting out-of-the-way sites that might inter-

views, plus megabytes of shareware, FAQs and other stuff, including a virtual tour of their San Francisco Bay-area studio. Back in June, I even downloaded a chilling QuickTime animation commissioned to show just how "someone" might have killed Nicole Brown Simpson and Ron Goldman.

Sign on at <http://www.cnet.com> and be sure to subscribe to "Digital Dispatch," the cnet newsletter that will be e-mailed to you free every week. In addition to other useful information, you'll get a list of interesting Web sites, like

• <http://kpix.com> — The KPX Golden Gate Bridge Camera atop the Fairmont Hotel on San Francisco's Nob

Scott Wolf



wise get lost in the shuffle.

Of course, your best bet is to check in with PCG regularly (even I learned a lot from my buddy Steve Poole's "Enter the Internet" feature in our June issue) and with our sister publication, The Net. If you didn't catch the "Netpourri" feature in the July issue, you missed some valuable info.

Interesting Websites

Have you ever watched the syndicated TV show "cnet Central"? Well, despite the hosts' unrelentingly cheerful and breathy excitement over every tiny bit of news, it's a really decent show that does a good job of covering the latest happenings in computers, multimedia, online services and the ongoing digital revolution.

They've just launched "cnet Online" — a Web site with more than 1,500 pages filled with product news and

Driven indoors by the intense summer heat, the Wolf goes rooting through the clutter of his office and comes up with some new books and web sites you might want to check out.

Hill sends a new image of the bridge every 5 minutes (Wow!).

• <http://www.mcom.com/fishcam/fishcam.html> — The Amazing Fish Cam! Photos of a fish tank updated every 5 minutes — and for those of us using Netscape 1.1, a continuously refreshed fish cam image (Double Wow!).

Some other Web sites I've stumbled across are <http://www.sgi.com> — as stunningly beautiful a site as you'd imagine from Silicon Graphics, the folks responsible for much of the 3-D rendering you've seen in the latest PC games.

If you were intrigued by Matt's preview of Suncom's new F-15 Eagle joystick, check out <http://www.xnet.com/~reno/suncom.html> where you can get the complete lowdown on all of Suncom products.

Ever read the book *Stupid PC Tricks?* It was written by my cousin, Bob "Dr. Macintosh" LeVitus, who's just gone to work for Power Computing Corp., the first company licensed by Apple to sell Macintosh compatibles. You can peek into his office via the BobCam at <http://www.powercc.com>. If by some chance it's not up and running yet, you can spy on his boss instead with the SamCam.

And, finally, just in case Activision missed its July release for *MechWarrior 2*, you can get all the latest news, conferences, screenshots and QuickTime movies from the game by typing GO MECHWAR on CompuServe.

Worthless Websites

In the immortal words of TV's Butt-Head, "Ya gotta have stuff that sucks to have stuff that's cool." So if you're really bored, you can log on to <http://www.zima.com> or <http://www.ticketmaster.com>. Yes, the alcoholic beverage for yuppie pseudo-slackers has its own Web site! And those monopolists at Ticketmaster have found yet another way into your pockets — courtesy of the Net.

Well, that just about covers it. If you need me, I'll be at the bottom of the nearest pool with my SCUBA gear and a few tanks of oxygen.

PCG



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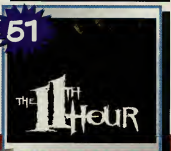
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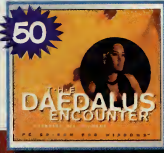
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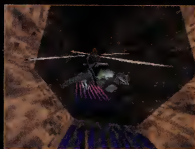
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What ever happened to...?

an Livingstone was one of the biggest names going in the early days of RPGs. In 1975, he and Steve Jackson (not to be confused with the Steve Jackson responsible for GURPS) teamed up to found the Games Workshop, the company responsible for bringing Dungeons and Dragons to the U.K. In 1977, Games Workshop put out their own game in the form of a miniatures battle set called Warhammer.

In 1982, Livingstone and Jackson collaborated again to create the immensely popular Fighting Fantasy novels, a series that combined the choose-your-own-adventure book with combat to create a surprisingly playable fantasy game that could be enjoyed alone. The pair worked together on the original book, *The Warlock of Firetop Mountain*, and Ian went on to pen several more titles in the series on his own, including *The Forest of Doom*, *City of Thieves*, and *Deathtrap Dungeon*. Somewhere along the way, he even found time to launch *White Dwarf* magazine, which still stands as one of the most revered roleplaying periodicals in print. When Games Workshop was sold in 1992, Ian was a rich man with a head full of the hot ideas. So where did he go?

As it turns out, Livingstone has been hanging out in the industry we all love so much for quite a while. As one of the founding investors in Domark, Ian began looking to put some of his ideas into what was then the emerging world of computer roleplaying.

Now, 11 years later, Ian's early vision of solitary roleplaying is being born again on the PC. Although it's still in its earliest stages, Domark let me get a peek at their new RPG *Fighting Fantasy*, and gave me some hints as to what the series might mean for the future of roleplaying.

Fighting Fantasy, based on the novel series, will use a first-person, free movement

engine (a la *Doom* and *Descent*) to take players through fantastically detailed dungeons filled with both classic monsters (orcs, goblins, and trolls) and new creations. In addition to the physical danger these monsters will pose, players will also face insidious puzzles and traps around every corner.

Combat will be much like that in a fighting game, providing the player with both action and adventuring. While this blend may not sound appealing to every RPG fan, the actual mechanics are very impressive, and seem to favor the thoughtful player more than the kid who can press buttons the fastest.

Although the original

filled with magic and monsters. As a mercenary commander, your character controls a small platoon that can take on military jobs in order to gain enough cash to purchase men and more powerful equipment and magic.

As you complete your contracts, you'll eventually run across a plot that threatens the tenuous balance that holds the already war-torn world together. Squad-level roleplaying has for the most part been ignored by publishers (notable exceptions being *King's Bounty* and *Warcraft*), so it's refreshing to see a company take a step in this direction.

From the Warhammer 40,000 universe, Mindscape is

Trent C. Ward



series was intended for single-gamer play, Domark is looking to include network capabilities that will allow several friends to wander about the same dungeon simultaneously. Although plans are still completely tentative, the company hints that in the future they'd like to set up an online service, similar to the one being used with their new *Confirmed Kill* flight simulator, to enable up to 300 different players at once.

Meanwhile, another company has purchased the license to one of the worlds that Ian worked while with Games Workshop. At E3, Mindscape announced their intentions to release two games based on the Warhammer universe by the end of the year. The first title, *Warhammer Fantasy Battles*, will be a Windows-only product, and details the eternal struggle between the forces of Chaos and the Empire to control a world

Twenty years ago, young Ian Livingstone began work in the RPG field that led to the still-popular Warhammer series. Now, Ian is hard at work bringing more new concepts to computer roleplaying.



Mindscape's *Warhammer Fantasy Battles* will be filled with detailed info on all of the monsters and magic of the Universe of Chaos from the Games Workshop.

releasing *Warhammer 40,000: Dark Crusaders*. Using an amazing engine that the company promises will deliver resolutions of up to 1280x1024, the game will drop players into a paranoid world where it's impossible to tell your allies from your foes. For those not familiar with this game world, expect the same big and nasty monsters from your standard Tolkien lore, but armed with some of the nastiest armor and weaponry this side of Star Wars. To complete the immersive effect, Mindscape has decided to support several of the more popular virtual reality headsets. This one's another game that looks like it may step outside the status quo.

In 1996, Mindscape intends to release several more titles based on the Games Workshop line, including an action game based on the *Warhammer Fantasy Battle System*, a *Warhammer 40,000* strategy game, and games built in the *Man O' War* and *Warhammer Epic* traditions.

Ian's new influence in the world of computer gaming can only mean better things in the long run for fantasy enthusiasts. But it still leaves me wondering (as I often do) when other companies are going to stop spending all of their money on licenses to be converted by people outside of the roleplaying industry, and decide to put those roleplaying experts to work on producing new worlds designed specifically for the computer. While this direction of development may take more time, in the long run, the gaming community will be stronger for the trouble.

PCG

Blips on the Radar

One of my favorite short story writers, Tony Early, came up with a perfect phrase in his latest collection of gems (*Here We Are in Paradise*, Little, Brown, 1994): "If there is one true thing I know to tell you, it is this: in North Carolina, even in the mountains, it takes more than a month of your life to live through August."

By the time you read this, the muggy heat of late summer will be covering my state like a blanket that's been used to dry a big, wet dog. Stupefying heat and enervating humidity will claim the land for a seemingly endless period of weeks. They're called the Dog Days because they reduce you to the state of a mangy old hound sprawled on a front porch, its tongue lolling and its tail barely capable of a listless thump or two.

It's also the Dog Days for the PC gaming industry: big releases are few, and many of the games that trickle in are marginal turkeys the companies release without enthusiasm.

Ah, but with the end of summer and the quickening of commerce that always accompanies the approach of the holidays, the floodgates will open and we reviewers will go from famine to feast, barely able to find enough playing time to make our deadlines.

For wargamers, the autumn months will be a cornucopia of first-rate titles that promises to be not just a bumper crop, but perhaps the most outstanding line-up the genre has ever produced.

Never before have there been so many I-can't-wait-to-get-my-hands-on-that-one-product — and to think that only three years ago, some observers were predicting the demise of the wargame!

Two of the most eagerly awaited titles in the entire his-

tory of the genre will finally appear: *Third Reich* from Avalon Hill, and *Beyond Squad Leader* from Atomic Games. I first saw a demo of the computerized *Third Reich* at my first CES show in 1988 (!) and have been eagerly awaiting it ever since. It's been tweaked and polished and nurtured through every sort of growing pain a game can endure, and it ought to be a thoroughbred.

Ditto for *Beyond Squad Leader*, which promises to be the ultimate Personal War Movie. I've seen a lot of screens and segments and interviewed all the major programmers, artists, and designers, and I predict that this game will be worth every day of the wait.

William R. Trotter



I am equally certain that MicroProse's *Across the Rhine* will justify all the time and work that's gone into it, and I applaud the decision to hold it back until it fulfills the ambitious intentions of its creators. No other armored warfare sim has quite equalled the standard set by *M-1 Tank Platoon* back in 1989, but that is about to change. From what I've seen, this game will capture the essence of the vast, sweeping, post-D-Day campaign with unequalled realism and zest.

Also eagerly awaited is Alliance's *Tac-Ops*. This game may be to ground combat what *Harpoon* is to modern naval action, with the look and feel of a wargame designed by professional soldiers for the training of other professionals.

A bit farther down the road from Alliance is the Larry-Bond-designed *Command at Sea*, described by a company spokesman as "*Harpoon* for

World War Two." Bond is, in my opinion, the best writer working in the "military thriller" genre, so any rule-set he's devised is likely to be both authentic and full of drama.

Fans of naval action, in fact, have a great gaming season in store. QQP is almost ready to release *The Lost Admiral 2*, which promises to incorporate a host of users' suggestions, as well as superior graphics, to improve on what was already a fiendishly addictive game. Avalon Hill projects a Thanksgiving release for the PC conversion of its classic Nelsonian board game, *Wooden Ships and Iron Men*, and SSI will launch *Silent Hunter*, its Pacific-Theater sub-

marine sim, sometime in September.

Like so many other gamers, I spent a ridiculous amount of time messing around with SSI's *Tanks!*, devising all sorts of custom scenarios. The game generated an enormous amount of feedback from players, all of which SSI has dutifully considered while designing the sequel, *Steel Panthers* (which may be out by the time you read this). Even more exciting is the third game in the series, *Rifles!*, which covers the neglected 1850-1900 period. Included will be engagements from the Civil War and the Crimean campaigns — a whopping 50 in-box scenarios are planned, and the customizing program should allow history-buffs to fight even the most obscure Victorian colonial clashes.

I know there are still some hard-cases out there who poo-poo wargames with a fantasy spin, but if they ignore SSG's *Warlords II Deluxe* or Virgin's *Command and Conquer*, they're doing themselves a disservice. *Warlords* is simply a great tactical combat game — just think of your wizards as heavy artillery and your dragons as B-52s — and this CD-ROM incarnation has been enhanced to the teeth with new graphics, new features, and more than two dozen new scenarios.

Command and Conquer is based on the highly-regarded combat system used in *Dune 2*. It's a real-time, cutthroat slugfest set in the near future, incorporating both contemporary weapons and futuristic designs that the player must develop and produce within the game's elaborate economic sub-game. More than an hour of video and animation gives the game a sexy look, and the graphics, from the few peeks I've had on them, are spectacular.

So many games, so little time...Three years ago, good war games were so few and far between that we almost discontinued this column for lack of things to write about. Now, it's getting hard to keep up with all the good stuff.

Truly, fellow wargamers, if this is not the millennium, it's pretty darn close.

From his home base in muggy North Carolina, General Bill Trotter scans the latest intelligence reports and predicts a bumper crop of war-games for the autumn season.

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The King of Sims

If you enjoy raising mountains, building cities, creating planets, and setting the rules for life itself — all on your computer — then you have Will Wright to thank for your good complex.

Wright, a co-founder of Maxis and the creative genius behind *SimCity*, has been a driving force in the growth of computer entertainment. At 36, Wright is something of a computer gaming mogul. His career mirrors the growth of gaming itself, and his creations stand alone as shining examples of how games can be fun, educational, and endlessly rewarding. Would anyone else have created simulations of cities, planets, and life itself?

Probably not. Wright, together with the company he co-founded in 1987, has run off a string of real-life sims that have been often brilliant and always interesting:

SimCity, *El-Fish*, *SimAnt*, *SimCity 2000*, *SimEarth*, *SimFarm*, *SimHealth*, *SimLife*, *SimTower*, *SimTown*. Not all were successful, and not all of them made for fun gaming, but just about every title stands as a genre unto itself. *SimCity*, of course, has been hugely successful, making little gods of us all. That sim is rivaled only by Microsoft's *Flight Simulator* as the best-selling computer entertainment product in history.

Now Maxis is at a crossroads. The company went public this summer, which means Wright spends more time these days in meetings with corporate suits than he'd like. Such is the price of success.

The infusion of capital that came with the public stock offering promises to make Maxis a company on the move. Maxis is a bit reluctant to discuss products under development, but you can expect to see sims that will give you a much closer look at the cities you've created.

"We're hitting closer and closer to the human scale,"

Wright says. "We've purposefully avoided that in the past, because humans are so hard to emulate, even remotely. But we're getting to the point now where we can begin to simulate humans. Instead of playing our computer world, players will be able to interact with that world. We're interested in branching out a bit from the god sims. We're looking at games where you have a point of view and limited control."

Sorry, anxious readers: Maxis isn't saying any more than that. We'll have to wait and see what worlds Maxis delivers next.

One aspect of Maxis games isn't likely to change. I still like the idea of more

been a bit too sophisticated for most gamers.

"The simulation I'm most proud of is *SimEarth*," he says. "Not really a game, because it wasn't a terribly interesting game. But as a simulation, it's really one of the best global models out there. We did quite a bit of research on that one. There were some interesting climatic factors that it did just as good a job simulating as some of the sophisticated computers models."

"But," he laughs, "most of us propeller-heads couldn't care less."

That sort of accuracy and sophistication is a hallmark of Wright's games. Maxis simulations are so accurate that the company launched a business

simulations division, simulating refinery operations for Chevron and power grids for Pacific Gas & Electric. But what was his biggest disappointment? *SimAnt*.

"We should have tuned that one better," he said. "I didn't do a good job of conveying how cool ants are."

Wright's growth has helped spur the work of entertainment software as a market, introducing hundreds of thousands of people to the possibilities of computer entertainment. So what does he think of this monster he helped create?

When Wright looks at other games on the shelves, he finds a lot to like — and he finds a lot of garbage, too.

"The quality in general is going up," he says. "A few people out there really know what they're doing. And then there are a lot of people who are climbing a very long learning curve."

His worry is that poorly conceived and badly designed games could turn off some first-time game buyers.

"I worry about the consumer's perception," he says. "There are a few good games and a lot of mediocre ones."

So what's Wright playing these days?

"I've been playing *TIE Fighter* a long time now," Wright says. "It's a brilliant blend of strategy and action. You have to think in order to win. You can't just go in and blow up everything."

Wright is also a fan of Bullfrog's latest crop of games, and he's been playing *Full Throttle* with his 8-year-old daughter. It was his daughter's interest in the world of ants that inspired Wright to create *SimAnt*.

"She tests all my games, and tells me what she likes and doesn't like," he says. "You learn a lot by watching children play games. When she plays *SimCity 2000*, she'll spend most of her time playing with the terrain editor. To her, it's like a big sandbox. That might give me some ideas for later down the road."

Keep thinking, Will. We're all waiting to see what's next.

PCG

Lee Buchanan



open-ended games, where there's no winning or losing," Wright explains. "The most important thing is a game where you can demonstrate creativity, where you find a solution, rather than find the one path to victory that the programmer built into the game."

Like most of us, Wright was into models as a kid, and that's basically what his sims are: models in motion. "A simulation is in some sense a subset of a model. A model can be any representation of reality — maybe a plastic model sitting on a table, or a computer model of a city," he says. "A simulation is a model through time, the dynamics through which the model might change."

There have been hits and misses along the way, of course. Some of his sims have

This month, Lee introduces us to a man who showed us all how we could play God — Will Wright, co-founder of Maxis and creator of the classic *SimCity*.

Memory Management of a Different Kind

It seems like about half of the words I've written for *PC Gamer* magazine have been about memory management, either in how-to articles or here in the Tech Shop column. As hard as it can be to grasp the subtleties of extended and enhanced memory, to wrestle EMM386 into submission and to maximize the amount of conventional memory and upper memory blocks you have available, trying to deal with physical random-access memory itself can be almost as puzzling.

RAM is a PC's main working storage, so it's critical to the computer's performance. When you run a program, the executable file is copied from the hard disk into RAM, where its binary instructions and associated data can be read roughly a thousand times faster than off disk. A PC is designed to read and write memory at a specific speed, so there's nothing to be gained by using faster RAM. But adding more memory can help a lot.

One of most frustrating things about RAM is that it really hasn't improved much lately. Often PC components have gotten faster, cheaper, physically smaller, and logically more capacious. In disk drives, Western Digital's 1280 megabyte IDE disk costs almost exactly what their 213MB model sold for in early 1993; that's a six-fold improvement, and the new model's faster too. In the meantime, RAM has held firm at a leisurely 70 ns access time, and the best street price has simply bounced around near \$35-\$45 per megabyte the whole time.

When you're dealing with RAM, the rules you have to follow when you add or replace memory are just one more headache. Two different kinds of SIMMs (Single Inline Memory Modules) are being used in PCs now: an older, smaller design with 30 signal pins, and a newer 72-pin

design. The difference is that 30-pin SIMMs only have eight pins assigned to carrying data, while the 72-pin module can deliver 32 bits of data at a time. That's important because a 486 CPU has a 32-bit data bus; to read or write 32 bits of data at a time, it has to access four separate 30-pin SIMMs.

The catch comes when you want to add more memory. Most systems that use 30-pin SIMMs have eight slots on the motherboard for holding memory modules, and if your system already has eight megabytes of RAM installed, that means that each slot already has a one megabyte SIMM in it. Your only option is

or just once and your slots are all filled.

The last few paragraphs actually glossed over one small point: most 30-pin SIMMs work with nine bits of data at a time, and 72-pin SIMMs often have 36-bit data paths. That extra bit out of nine is called a parity bit, used as a fairly crude way to check for errors in the other eight bits. Parity-based error-detection was part of the design of IBM's original PC, but its popularity is beginning to fade for a couple of reasons. For one thing, RAM is pretty darned reliable nowadays, and if a SIMM does fail, it's just as likely to simply go dead. Also,

a single parity bit will fail to detect about half of all possible memory errors and even when it finds one, all it can tell you is that there was an error.

For the most critical uses, the solution is to use an error-correcting rather than error-detecting memory system, with more redundant memory bits and extra logic circuitry that can repair errors when they occur. But such a system adds a lot to the cost of a computer, something that few manufacturers are willing to take on in such a competitive market. Even the 12.5% savings in memory cost that comes from eliminating memory parity checking is a compelling savings nowadays.

Other than a change in packaging and parity memory's disappearing act, RAM hasn't changed much in the past few years. But some major new memory technologies are beginning to appear lately. The first one to appear in quantity is EDO (Enhanced Data Output) RAM, a type of RAM that speeds up the memory access cycle by holding data on its output pins even after it's begun to fetch the next word of memory. This small change can improve memory performance by as much as 30% without increasing cost, and Pentium systems that use Intel's Triton chipset are already available with EDO RAM.

A couple of years down the road, SDRAM (Synchronous Dynamic Random-Access Memory) is expected to take over from EDO RAM, but a host of others like EDRAM, WRAM, HDRAM, CDROM, SGRAM and 3DRAM might also figure into the picture. These new technologies should help memory to keep up with CPUs' ever-growing appetite for data. Of course, it also means that any memory you buy for your PC today probably won't work in the next PC that you buy. Windows 95 promises to put an end to the nightmares of DOS memory management, but you can bet that memory will always loom large in the minds of PC owners.

Tim Victor



to replace four of them with four new four-megabyte modules, for a total of 20 megabytes. That's a heck of a jump in capacity, probably more than most of us would choose otherwise, and it leaves you with four megabytes of orphaned memory on your hands.


72-pin memory modules are a lot more common in new systems lately, and they take some of the worry out of memory upgrades. Since a 72-pin SIMM matches a 486's 32-bit data bus, you can run a 486 system off just one SIMM, and adding memory one SIMM at a time is no problem. But things start getting tricky again if you have a Pentium CPU. With its 64-bit data path, a Pentium takes its SIMMs in pairs of 72-pin modules. And with just four 72-pin SIMM slots on the typical motherboard, you're back in the same boat: add mem-

Managing your PCs memory — all that EMS, XMS crap — can be a royal pain. But as Tim so ably points out, there's a physical side to managing RAM, too. Getting those little SIMMs in place is just the beginning...

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This month we've donned our wetsuits and traveled to the ocean floor to take a look at the best strategies for overcoming those terrors from the deep in the action-

packed sequel to *X-COM*.

Plus, we've compiled the best *Rise of the Triad* cheats and even helped our readers puzzle their way through *Ecstatica* and *Cyberia*.

So let's get started!

Write to us at:

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Overcome the Terrors of the Deep

Making the oceans alien-free the *PC Gamer* way!

It's been about a year since we revealed our tips for the original *X-COM*, and while that advice helped a lot of our readers, the challenges in *Terror From the Deep* have even veteran *X-COM*-ers shaking their heads. This time around the aliens are tougher, and you'll have to make do with lousy weapons in the beginning. So here's a refresher course that'll get you on the right track, and a few special tips on how to make these new aliens wish they'd never seen planet earth.

Building the perfect base

As in the original *X-COM*, choosing the site for your first major base is one of the most important decisions you can make, because you need to keep member nations happy while giving yourself a good overview of alien activity. You'll want make sure your first base is close to a large number of contributing nations (like those in the North Atlantic) or at least one major contributor (like the United States).

This first base should have wide-array sonar, extra storage space, and torpedo defenses as soon as possible.

Ideally, you'll start building these before accepting your first mission. The next step should be to promptly recruit an extra complement of aquanauts.

To get a better overview of the alien threat and to further serve the nations of the world, start building a second base that's a mirror image of the first — a major stronghold that can research and detect the alien threat and serve as a strike headquarters against any attack.

Strike bases

Once your major bases are established and you've got a few successful missions under your belt, you'll want to build several smaller strike bases with the bare minimum of living quarters, sub pens, and general stores to give quick access to terror sites and to bring down alien subs. Teams and equipment for these strike bases can be much more specialized than those at your major bases, which means you can design the perfect quick-response team for surface missions or shipping lane attacks.

Research!

As any *X-COM* fan knows, the surest way to success is a good research program, and in *Terror from the Deep* research plays an even more important role. While it may be hard to balance the books at the end of the first few months, you'll want to start an aggressive research project even before you've begun your first mission. Recruit the maximum number of scientists your living space allows (build more living space as necessary)



After fully researching the Gauss technology, put your technicians to work on producing large quantities of the Gauss cannon to sell for extra money.

during the first few months, and begin researching Gauss weapons immediately. Then, over the next few months, recruit the maximum number of technicians, expanding your workshops to accommodate them. This will pay off in two ways: the scientists will be able to begin researching better armor and weapons for your troops, and in turn the troops will be able to bring back more alien technology to research on each successful mission.

As a bonus, if you keep your technicians busy manufacturing new weapons, you'll be able to sell these goods to supplement the funding received from the member nations.

And with a little creative shuffling, you can even eliminate the cost of salaries for scientists and technicians by



Ideally, your major bases should be as well-equipped as this one. Pay close attention to base defense to avoid fighting alien forces in your backyard.

Picking the Perfect Soldier



Before sending soliders out on active duty, check the attribute screen to make sure they're prepared to face the dangers that await. The big factors to consider are bravery, morale, and reactions. Once you're confident in their abilities, a couple of successful missions is all it takes to build the factors in the other areas.

rotating (transferring) these staffs from both of your major bases on the last day of the month. Since they're in transit during the monthly report, those salaries mysteriously appear as a profit. You'll lose any research the scientists were working on at the time of the transfer, but a large enough staff won't take more than a month on most projects, anyway.

What to accept and when

Depending on where you've built your first base, you may find several of the early missions are alien attacks on shipping lanes or land-based attacks on port cities. Unless you've fully researched Gauss technology and have at least the Gauss rifle, you'll want to refuse these missions. While it won't look good on the

monthly reports, the underwater weapons you'll start out with will be useless during surface missions, leaving your troops with only magna-grenades to use against those deadly aliens.

Bagging new technology

Before long, an alien colony will be discovered by X-COM intelligence. It's extremely important that these be eliminated ASAP. But if you don't have the firepower to take on a colony, there can be some benefit in leaving it alone for a bit. Attack alien supply ships as they replenish the colony, and you just might net some of the technology and elements you need to research and manufacture better weapons and armor for your troops.

Managing your fighting forces

A superior fighting force is the best way to ensure success on the battlefield, even when the enemy has you outgunned and outnumbered. So start building a team with a select group of soldiers (be sure and check their bravery and molecular control attributes), then let their abilities grow as you lead them through a couple of successful missions. Once you've got a crack team, transfer some of your experienced soldiers to other bases to help rookies live long enough to get promoted and gain experience.

Rookies who panic or have low molecular control abilities should be sacked. They're a danger to your experience soldiers as well as a nuisance on the battlefield.

Able Seaman Hoser



Alien colony assaults

Sooner or later you'll have to begin making assaults on well-defended alien colonies, but with a little preparation, you can take down these two-level strongholds without sacrificing too much of your team.

Split your team into two distinct groups, with slight variations for each. The first, the assault team, should consist of heavily armed senior officers with high bravery and molecular control levels as well as lots of movement points.

The second team should be a capture-and-resupply team equipped with thermal shock launchers, ammo and supplies for the first team. Use the first team to secure the route to the goal zone and eliminate any alien threat, then bring in the second team and move to the second phase.



A good assault force against alien colonies should consist of two distinct teams, like this elite force.

The resupply team will prove invaluable in the second phase of the colony mission, since the only weapons you can carry over to this phase are the ones your troops are carrying.

Once they've done their resupply gig, the second team can then take over as the primary unit and begin stunning aliens for research and questioning. (Don't waste your time or ammo stunning aliens during the first phase of two-phase missions; they'll just be counted as dead and can't be taken with you.) The first team can now be used in support of these operations and as reconnaissance in the dark recesses of the colony.



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Product Information Number 137

Ecstatica

How to survive the horrors of 10th century Europe.

Part horror adventure, part black comedy, *Ecstatica* is one of the strangest games we've seen. Over the past few months, a handful of our readers have asked for help escaping the demons that inhabit the game, so we've compiled the answers to the most common questions into this helpful walkthrough.



Once you're in the store room, you'll be able to avoid the relentless attack of the werewolf if you jump into the barrel at the right moment. If you hide in the barrel long enough, the werewolf leaves.

Potion power

One of the most common questions our readers have been asking is where to find the three parts that make the potion described in the picture at the witch's house. The first two ingredients are pretty obvious and easy to find: the special root you'll need is in the church, directly beneath the hanged priest. The second element of the potion is a flower, found on the path to the rectory.

The final element, a branch, is a tough one and requires a bit more preparation; you'll want to make sure you have a weapon of some sort before you try to tackle this one. In the alley across from the church, you'll find a building with a banner hanging outside.

Enter the building and you'll see an old man fighting with a green dragon. Run over to the dragon (don't worry, it won't attack you) and it'll hit the road. With the dragon gone, the old man will tell you how the town was overtaken by demons and ask you to take him to the storeroom. That's where you'll find the third element for the potion.

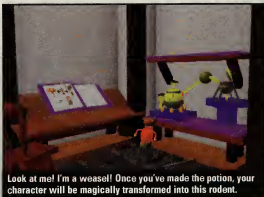
Leaving the storeroom isn't going to be easy, though, because the werewolf is lurking just outside. Open the door, then run back inside the storeroom (the door will shut behind you). Keep this up

until the beast breaks down the door, then jump inside the barrel beside the old man. Hide there until the creature has left (this can take a while; he's pretty thorough in his search), then grab the branch from his shelf and head back to the witch's home.

Weasel boy

Once you've added all the elements to the potion, you'll be transformed into a weasel-like creature. Thankfully, the werewolf won't bother you in this state, but you *will* have to watch for snakes (use the "5" key on the number pad to run). Make your way to the church and go down the stairs behind the altar, where you'll find a small opening.

You'll need to explore a bit to find a



Look at me! I'm a weasel! Once you've made the potion, your character will be magically transformed into this rodent.

stairway where the spell will magically wear off. Walk up the stairs, and you'll find a terrified old knight wielding a sword. Give him a quick punch and he'll throw you his sword. Take the sword to the lake, stand on the pedestal and throw it in. The lady in the lake will rise out of the water and make you a knight. Now you can enter the wizard's castle.

A bone, a book and a broom

Once you've gained access to the wizard's castle, you'll find a spell that can destroy the beast in the tower. One part of the spell is a bone-shaped icon found in the rectory.



The witch's broom is the only way to survive the booby traps of the castle and find the magic book.

Getting the magic book is the tricky part of creating the spell. It's deep in the lower levels of the wizard's castle; problem is, you can't take the stairs without getting skewered by some devious spike traps. To remedy this, go outside the wizard's castle to the little house near the fountain. Inside you'll find a witch's broom that'll let you float past the deadly traps.

End game

Once you've got the magic book and bone in hand, take them to the stone circle to create a supercharged icon that can destroy the demon. You'll need to use the broom again to enter the depths of the dungeon through the dangerous



You'll have to decide whether you want to join this evil creature or try and destroy him.

castle path — or you can choose to take the stairs in the church. Once you reach the lowest level, you'll confront the beast the witch conjured up. Follow his instructions and join him for a chat, then make your choice. If you choose to destroy him, just back away from the table, keeping the demon in sight. Then, when he turns into a dragon, fire away with the icon.

Reader's Request

Cyberia

Dear Strategy Central,

I've been playing *Cyberia* for a couple of weeks and really enjoy the game's mix of arcade/puzzle action. It's only the second computer game I've ever played, but I've managed to puzzle my way to the inoculation room with both arcade and puzzle difficulty set on the highest level. But now I can't seem to get anywhere. What I'd like to know is what exactly am I supposed to do at the inoculation terminal and how do I avoid the flying nanite that attacks me when I try to leave the adjoining room?

Any tips or cheats you could give me would be a great help.

Michael Federov
Detroit, Michigan

We don't have any cheats for you, Michael, but we do have a few tips for getting you out of the inoculation room and on to the climax.

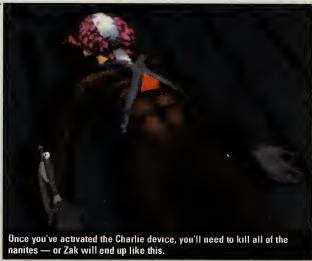
First, you'll need to access the inoculation terminal and select the appropriate sample so you can inoculate Zak.

One of the last three (M6-M7-M8) will work, but you'll have to use trial-and-error to figure out which one. Select one, then step inside the inoculation booth and press the up-arrow key to have Zak activate it. If you don't hear a mechanized voice say "Host contamination eliminated," you'll need to step out of the booth quickly and reset the terminal with another selection. Repeat this procedure until you hear the message.

Back in the Charlie lab, you'll need to access Ian MacAllen's terminal to deal with those nanites (be careful not to fire the shock-wave when the Charlie device first activates, or you'll burn Zak's foot off). The device will enter the shaft, where

you'll need to direct it to knock off all of the nanites. These are pretty tough, and you can't let even one get past you. Near the end of the segment, pay close attention to the upper portion of the screen; there's one particularly deadly nanite stuck to the ceiling.

*Once you've taken care of the nanites, you'll be able to leave the lab and enter the elevator shaft that leads to the *Cyberia* weapons chamber and the endgame confrontation.*



Once you've activated the Charlie device, you'll need to kill all of the nanites — or Zak will end up like this.

Rise of the Triad Cheats

Defeat El Oscuro's island cult with these killer codes!

Rise of the Triad has proven itself to be a cut above the *Doom*-clone crowd, with plenty of tough levels and puzzles that even die-hard maze freaks have trouble dealing with. To help you get through the game to the ultimate goal of defeating Oscuro, here's a list of helpful cheat codes we've come across that'll give you the firepower, health, and maps you'll need.

To use these codes, just type them in during a game (remember to type the first code, "DIPSTICK," to enable the cheats).



The firebomb cheat makes short work of Oscuro's followers. Just don't get too close to the blast zone, or you'll catch hell yourself.

DIPSTICK	Enable/Disable Cheat Codes
SHOOTME	Bulletproof Armor
BURNME	Asbestos Armor
CHOJIN	Weaponless With Weapons
BOOZE	Drunk Missile
BONES	FlameWall
TOOSAD	God Mode (Temporary Invulnerability)
FLYBOY	Mercury Mode
BADTRIP	Shrooms Mode
BOING	Elasto Mode
SPEED	Enable Autorun
PANIC	Reset to normal, full health, no modes, keys or guns
WHACK	Whack yourself
SGME	Kill Character
DIMON	Light Diminishing On
DIMOFF	Light Diminishing Off
GOTO	Go to another level
GOOBERS	Restart current level
GOGATES	Exit to DOS
GOARCH	Exit Current Level
LONDON	Fog On
NODNOL	Fog Off
SHINEON	Light Sourcing On
SHINEOFF	Light Sourcing Off
LUNGUNG	Gas Mask
SIXTOXS	Items Aplenty
HUNTPACK	Outfit Player (BulletProof Armor, Keys, HeatSeeker)

JOHNWOO	Double Pistols
PLUGME	MP40 Machine Gun
VANILLA	Bazooka
FIREBOMB	FireBomb
HOTTIMES	Heatseeker
SEeya	Hand of God
	(Permanent God Mode)
RIDE	Missile Camera On/Off
WHERE	Toggles coordinate display On/Off

Rise of the Triad also features some fun things that you'll only see certain times of the year. By changing your system date at the DOS prompt (type DATE and hit the Enter key, then type in the new date), you can get an advance peek at some holiday surprises the *ROTT* designers hid in the game. Try setting your system's date for Easter, Halloween and Christmas, and you'll see your favorite H.U.N.T. agents dressed in holiday garb.

Be sure to change your system date back when you're finished, especially if you run any applications that rely on accurate date and time information.

PCG



The H.U.N.T. team dresses up in special holiday garb for Easter, Halloween and X-Mas.



couple of months ago, we asked you what you thought about full motion video in games. True to form, your answers were insightful and interesting.

Feelings on Full-Motion

Dear PCG,

With all the new games coming out from Sierra and other companies, characters are being switched to live actors rather than drawn heroes. I think it takes away from the games, especially when the actor playing a role is someone who is widely known for something else. It is harder to "get into" the game when the actor just isn't as believable in the role as a made-up, animated character would be. Would any of you like to see some two-bit actor try and live up to the role of Intergalactic swashbuckler/janitor Roger Wilco? I think that many companies are too worried about the "look" of the game, and not enough about the "feel" of a game.

A constant reader of PCG,
Seth Gregory
via AOL

Dear PC Gamer,

In the future, I plan to join a software development firm that makes computer game software. I also plan to get married in the next few months. Do you know if game developers like Chris Crawford, Sid Meier, etc. are married, and if so, how do they stay that way when working 80 hours-plus a week? I don't think I could have a marriage and a career in software engineering while working so many hours! Should I get out of this relationship or pursue my career? (heh heh)

Thanks,
Seth
via AOL

P.S.: I think full motion video in computer games is a waste unless it helps immerse the player even further into the game, or somehow adds to the fun and playability of the game. There are many fun games out there that have no full-motion video; and then there are games that are about as much fun as mowing the lawn and contain almost nothing but small, grainy video.

Here's a new topic to ponder: How do you feel about the "Hollywood invasion" of PC games? Do you like games based on movies and featuring big-name celebrities? Is it the wave of the future, or a passing fad?

We couldn't agree more, guys, and you speak for most of the people who responded to the full-motion video question. FMV should be just another story-telling tool, a means to an end — not an end in itself. Too many FMV games are designed with the belief that video is enough, that gamers will be content to sit back and watch a grainy movie. But a look at the most popular titles shows that PC gamers want more interaction than "interactive movies" offer.

As for the marriage question: We've never asked game designers how their hectic schedules affect their personal relationships; we've always assumed they were like us, and didn't have time for actual lives. It's a good question, though; maybe some gaming pro will drop us a line with some answers.



Good RPGs are hard to come by, Bonnie, but we recommend *Star Trail* without reservation.

Grandma Seeks RPG Advice

Dear PC Gamer,

I'm a 54-year-old Grandma who loves Roleplaying Games. I just purchased a computer, but have not been impressed with the games at all.

Everyone praised *Myst*, but I found it lifeless and dull. I've been playing *Kyrandia III*, but it's not my cup of tea. I find that I'm still buying SNES games for the graphics and fun.

Would you help out a fellow gamer and give me some hints to what games I can purchase that would be RPG games in the tradition I'm used to?

I know from your articles that they're few and far between, but any help would be appreciated.

Thank you,
Bonnie Taylor
Chicago, IL

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*If it's a good roleplaying game you're after, we can understand why you were disappointed with *Myst* and *Kyrandia III*; those are graphic adventures, and while they have their obvious merits, they won't satisfy that RPG craving. There are plenty of PC-based RPGs on the market; they generally have greater depth than the Nintendo games you're used to, but that's hardly a bad thing. Here's a handful of RPGs we can recommend: Sir-tech's *Realms of Arkania: Star Trail*; Bethesda's *The Elder Scrolls: Arena*; and, of course, the *Ultima* series: games 1 through 8, from Origin.*

Pardon Us!

Dear PC Gamer,

Don't take this the wrong way, but your magazine really does stink!

Every time I rip off the plastic wrap and open the magazine up, I get this horrible smell that is almost nauseating. But I love reading your magazine and I plan to subscribe — it's just that I was just wondering if anyone else writes about this problem.

Sincerely,
Chris Smith
Spokane, WA

Don't mind the odor, Chris. That's just something we're experimenting with — a special mind-control gas designed to make you subscribe to the magazine. Judging from your letter, it seems to be working. Now, send us a million dollars...

Too Big For Their Britches?

Dear PC Gamer,

I recently purchased a copy of *Wing Commander III*, and although I met the system requirements, I had such a tough time running it that I returned it.

Surely such steep system requirements must limit the salability of this or any product. How much do game developers weigh such considerations?

Thanks,
Dana Minyard
via AOL

Willi does have some heavy system requirements, Dana, but that doesn't seem to have hurt the game's sales too badly; it's enjoyed a respectable stay on the PC bestseller charts. Fortunately for Origin, they've created a game that people want to play badly enough to put up with the little memory-tricks needed to make it run.

Just a Few Questions...

Dear PC Gamer,
Could you have the game *Magic Carpet* on your CD, plus could you do a report on BBS? Also, I bought *Descent* on 3.5" disks at a store that sells used games. It said it had 30 levels, but I typed the code GABBAGABBAHEY and then I typed FARMERJOE, then I typed level 30 but it did nothing. So I tried 28, but that didn't work, so I typed 27 and it finally worked. Did someone edit the game, or is the one I bought just bad?

A subscriber,
Brad Engelhart
Sioux Falls, SD

Brad, your wish is our command — sort of. *Magic Carpet* was one of the featured demos on our February CD. It should still be available from our back issues department. And you don't have a bad copy of *Descent* — how could that game be anything but excellent? The catch is that

three of *Descent*'s 30 levels are "secret" levels; you have to find 'em on your own, since even the cheat codes won't get you to them.

Oh, My...Part II

Dear PCG,
You guys really dropped the ball in your response to Brian Harbaugh (July '95 letters). What appears to be enlarged testes on his sea monkeys (or brine shrimp, *Artemia*) are probably just sacs of eggs. There is no cause for alarm.

Sincerely,
Braden McDaniel
via AOL

That's a load off our minds, Braden. We had no idea sea monkeys actually reproduced; we thought they were strictly a just-add-water kind of pet. Congratulations on the blessed event, Mr. Harbaugh! How about naming the little ones after your friends at PCG?

Blazing Systems

Dear PC Gamer,
In your story on upgrading PCs (July 1995), you neglected to mention the most important (and cheapest!) upgrade any gamer must get.

I don't know how many of your readers are aware of this, but a lot of PCs can't really use the full potential of a 14,400 baud or 28,800 baud modem due to the "standard" UART 8250 chip on their RS232 cards.

To get some really blazing speed out of a modem connection (like with Doom, etc.), gamers need to replace that chip with a UART 16550 chip. These chips (if your RS232 card uses the "pop-out" type) can be replaced for about \$15; if you'd rather go first class, you can buy a new card for about \$40.

The standard RS232 card actually bottlenecks modem speeds down to about 9600 baud, regardless of what speed your modem can produce!
Am I right or am I right?

Sincerely,
Ray Kazmer
Sunland, CA

You're right, Ray, although we'd add that the problem only affects people using external modems that have to be connected to their PCs via the RS232 serial port. Internal modems that run at 14.4K or better have their own built-in 16550 chips. For the gamer who doesn't already have a high-speed modem and can spare a card slot, an internal modem is an even simpler solution to the big UART question.

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